THE RISING TIDE

MARGARET DELAND

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FREDERICA

THE RISING TIDE

BY

MARGARET DELAND

AUTHOR OF

The Iron Woman, Dr. Lavendar's People

ETC.

ILLUSTRATED BY

F. WALTER TAYLOR

"No doubt but ye are the people,
and wisdom shall die with you."
Job xii, 2

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THE RISING TIDE

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TO
LORIN DELAND

AUGUST 12, 1916

ILLUSTRATIONS

FREDERICA . . . . . *Frontispiece*

"LET ME EXPLAIN IT," FREDERICA'S MAN OF BUSINESS SAID . . . AND PROCEEDED TO PUT THE PROJECT INTO WORDS OF THREE LETTERS . . . . . *Facing p.* 22

HOWARD DID NOT NOTICE HER PREOCCUPATION. HE WAS POURING OUT HIS PLANS, LAURA PUNCTUATING ALL HE SAID WITH CRIES OF ADMIRATION AND ENVY . . . . . " 108

"DID YOU SEE THAT FISH JUMP?" HE ASKED. FREDERICA GAVE A DISGUSTED GRUNT . . . . . " 140

THE RISING TIDE

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CHAPTER I

A SINGLE car-track ran through Payton Street, and over it, once in a while, a small car jogged along, drawn by two mules. Thirty years ago Payton Street had been shocked by the intrusion upon its gentility of a thing so noisy and vulgar as a street-car; but now, when the rest of the town was shuttled with trolleys and clamorous with speed, it seemed to itself an oasis of silence. Its gentility had ebbed long ago. The big houses, standing a little back from the sidewalk, were given over to lodgers or small businesses. Indeed, the Paytons were the only people left who belonged to Payton Street's past—and there was a barber shop next door to them, and a livery-stable across the street.

"Rather different from the time when your dear father brought me here, a bride," Mrs. Payton used to say, sighing.

Her daughter agreed, dryly: "I hope so! Certainly nobody would live on Payton Street now, if they could afford to buy a lot in the cemetery."

Yet the Paytons, who could have bought several lots

in the cemetery (or over on the Hill, either, which was where they belonged!), did not leave the old house—a big, brownstone cube, with a belvedere on top of it that looked like a bird-cage. The yard in front of the house was so shaded by ailanthus-trees that grass refused to grow there, and an iron dog, guarding the patch of bare earth, was spotted with mold.

The street was very quiet,—except when the barber's children squabbled shrilly, or Baker's livery-stable sent out a few funeral hacks, or when, from a barred window in the ell of the Payton house, there came a noisy laugh. And always, on the half-hour, the two mules went tinkling along, their neat little feet cupping down over the cobble-stones, and their trace-chains swinging and sagging about their heels. The conductor on the car had been on the route so long that he knew many of his patrons, and nodded to them in a friendly way, and said it was a good day, or too cold for the season; occasionally he imparted information which he thought might be of interest to them.

On this October afternoon of brown fog and occasional dashes of rain he enlightened a lady with a vaguely sweet face, who signaled him to stop at No. 15.

"Miss Payton's out," he said, pulling the strap over his head and bringing his car to a standstill; "but her ma's at home. I brought the old lady back on my last trip, just as Miss Freddy was starting off with that pup of hers."

"It's the 'old lady' I've come to see," his fare said, smiling, and, gathering up her skirts, stepped down into

the Payton Street mud. The bell jangled and the mules went clattering off over the cobblestones.

Mrs. William Childs, picking her way to the sidewalk, said to herself that she almost wished Freddy and her dog were at home, instead of the "old lady."

"Poor dear Ellen," she thought, in amiable detachment from other people's troubles; "she's always asking me to sit in judgment on Fred—and there's nothing on earth I can do."

It occurred to her as she passed under the dripping ailanthus-trees and up the white marble door-steps that Payton Street was a gloomy place for a young creature like Frederica to live. "Even my Laura would kick," she thought; her thoughts were often in her Laura's vernacular. In the dark hall, clutching at the newel-post on which an Egyptian maiden held aloft a gas-burner in a red globe, she extended a foot to a melancholy mulatto woman, who removed her rubbers and then hung her water-proof on the rack beside a silk hat belonging to the late Mr. Payton—kept there, Mrs. Childs knew, to frighten perennially expected burglars.

"Thank you, Flora," she said. "Has Mr. Weston come yet?" When Flora explained that Mr. Weston was not expected until later, she started up-stairs—then hesitated, her hand on the shoulder of the Egyptian maiden: "Mr. Mortimore—he's not about?"

"Land, no, Mis' Childs!" the woman reassured her; "he don't ever come down 'thout his ma or Miss Carter's along with him."

Mrs. Childs nodded in a relieved way, and went on up

to the sitting-room where, as she had been warned, she and Mr. Arthur Weston, one of the trustees of what was popularly known as "the old Andy Payton estate," were to "sit in judgment." "It *is* hard for Fred to have Mortimore in the house," she thought, kindly; "poor Freddy!"

The sitting-room was in the ell, and pausing on the landing at the steps that led up to it, she looked furtively beyond it, toward another room at the end of the hall. "I wonder if Ellen ever forgets to lock the door on her side?" she thought;—"well, Nelly dear, how are you?" she called out, cheerfully.

Mrs. Payton, bustling forward to meet her, overflowed with exclamations of gratitude for her visit. "And such unpleasant weather, too! I do hope you didn't get your feet damp? I always tell Freddy there is no surer way to take cold than to get your feet damp. Of course she doesn't believe me, but I'm used to that! Is William's cold better? I suppose he's glad of an excuse to stay indoors and read about Bacon and Shakespeare; which was which? I never can remember! Now sit right down here. No, take this chair!"

The caller, moving from one chair to another, was perfectly docile; it was Ellen's way, and Mrs. Childs had long ago discovered the secret of a peaceful life, namely, always, so far as possible, to let other people have their own way. She looked about the sitting-room, and thought that her sister-in-law was very comfortable. "Laura would have teased me to death if I had kept my old-fashioned things," she reflected. The room was feminine as well as old-fashioned; the deeply upholstered chairs

and couches were covered with flounced and flowery chintz; on a green wire plant-stand, over-watered ferns grew daily more scraggy and anemic; the windows were smothered in lambrequins and curtains, and beadwork valances draped corner brackets holding Parian marble statuettes; of course there was the usual womanish clutter of photographs in silver frames. On the center-table a slowly evolving picture puzzle had pushed a few books to one side—pretty little books with pretty names, *Flowers of Peace* and *Messages from Heaven*, most of them with the leaves still uncut. It was an eminently comfortable room; indeed, next to her conception of duty, the most important thing in Mrs. Andrew Payton's life was comfort.

Just now, she was tenanciously solicitous for Mrs. Childs's ease; was she warm enough? Wasn't the foot-stool a little too high? And the fire—dear me! the fire *was* too hot! She must put up the screen. She wouldn't make tea until Mr. Weston came; yes, he had promised to come; she had written him, frankly, that he had simply got to do something about Freddy. "He's her trustee, as well as mine, and I told him he simply *must* do something about this last wild idea of hers. Now! isn't it better to have the screen in front of the fire?"

Mrs. Childs said the screen was most comfortable; then added, in uncertain reminiscence, "Wasn't Mr. Weston jilted ages ago by some Philadelphia girl?"

"Oh, dear, yes; so sad. Kate Morrison. She ran off with somebody else just a week before they were to be married. Horribly awkward for him; the invitations all

out! He went to Europe, and was agent for Payton's until dear Andrew died. You are quite sure you are not too warm?"

"No, indeed!" Mrs. Childs said. "How is Mortimore?" It was a perfunctory question, but its omission would have pained Mortimore's mother.

"*Very* well!" Mrs. Payton said; her voice challenging any one to suspect anything wrong with Mortimore's health. "He knew Freddy to-day; he was in the hall when she went out; he can't bear her dog, and he—he scolded a little. I'm sure I don't blame him! I hate dogs, myself. But he knew her; Miss Carter told me about it when I came in. I was so pleased."

"That was very nice," her visitor said, kindly. There was a moment's silence; then, glancing toward a closed door that connected the sitting-room with that room at the end of the ell, she said, hesitatingly: "Nelly dear, don't you think that perhaps Freddy wouldn't be so difficult, if poor Mortimore were not at home? William says he thinks—"

"My son shall never leave this house as long as I am in it myself!" Mrs. Payton interrupted, her face flushing darkly red.

"But it *is* unpleasant for Fred, and—"

"'Unpleasant' to have her poor afflicted brother in the house? Bessie, I wouldn't have thought such a thing of you! Let me tell you, once for all, as I've told you many, many times before—never, while I live, shall Mortimore be treated cruelly and turned out of his own home!"

"But William says they are not cruel, at—at those places; and Mortimore, poor boy! would never know the difference."

"He would! He would! Didn't I tell you he recognized his sister to-day? His sister, who cares more for her dog than she does for him! And he almost always knows me. Bessie, you don't understand how a mother feels—" she had risen and was walking about the room, her fat, worn face sharpening with a sort of animal alertness into power and protection. The claws that hide in every maternal creature slipped out of the fur of good manners: "We've gone all over this a hundred times; I know that you think I am a fool; and *I* think that you —well, never mind! The amount of it is, you are not a mother."

"My dear! What about my three children?"

"Three healthy children! What do you know of the real child, the afflicted child, like my Mortimore? Why, I'd see Freddy in her grave before I'd—" She stopped short. "I—I love both my children exactly the same," she ended, weakly. Then broke out again: "You and I were brought up to do our duty, and not talk about it whether it was pleasant or unpleasant. And let me tell you, if Freddy would do her duty to her brother, as old Aunt Adelaide did to her invalid brother, she'd be a thousand times happier than she is now, mixing up with perfectly common people, and talking about earning her own living! Yes, that's the last bee in her bonnet,—Working! a girl with a good home, and nothing on earth to do but amuse herself. She uses really vulgar words

about women who never worked for their living; you and me, for instance. 'Vermin'—no, 'parasites.' Disgusting! Yes; if Freddy was like her great-aunt Adelaide—" Mrs. Payton, sinking into a chair bubbly with springs and down, was calmer, but she wiped her eyes once or twice: "Aunt Adelaide gave up her life to poor Uncle Henry. Everybody says she had lots of beaux! I heard she had seven offers. But she never dreamed of getting married. She just lived for her brother. And they say *he* was dreadful, Bessie; whereas my poor Mortimore is only—not quite like other people." Mrs. Childs gasped. "When Morty was six months old," Mrs. Payton said, in a tense voice, "and we began to be anxious about him, Andrew said to the doctor, 'I suppose the brat' (you know men speak so frankly) 'has no brains?' and Dr. Davis said, 'The intellect is there, Mr. Payton, but it is veiled.' That has always been such a comfort to me; Morty's intellect is *there!* And besides, you must remember, Bessie, that even if he isn't—very intelligent, he's a *man*, so he's really the head of the family. As for Freddy, as I say, if she would follow her aunt Adelaide's example, instead of reading horrid books about things that when *I* was a young lady, girls didn't know existed, she'd be a good deal more comfortable to live with. Oh, dear! what am I going to do about her? As I wrote to Mr. Weston, when I asked him to come in this afternoon, what are we going to do about her?"

"What has poor Fred done now?" Fred's aunt asked, trying patiently to shut off the torrent of talk.

Mrs. Payton drew a long breath; her chin was still

unsteady. "It isn't so much this last performance, because, of course, in spite of what Mama says, everybody who knows Freddy, knows that there was—nothing wrong. But it's her ideas, and the way she talks. Really, Bessie—"

"My dear, they all talk most unpleasantly!"

Mrs. Payton shook her fair head. "Your Laura doesn't. I never heard Lolly say the sort of things Freddy does. She calls her father 'Billy-boy,' I know, but that's only fun—though in our day, imagine us calling our fathers by a nickname! No, Bessie, it's Freddy's taste. It's positively low! There is a Mrs. McKenzie, a scrubwoman out at the Inn, and she is—*you* know? It will be the seventh, and they really can hardly feed the six they have. And Freddy, *a young girl*, actually told Mrs. McKenzie she ought not to have so many children!"

"Well, Ellen, if there are too many now, it does seem—'"

"But, Bessie! A girl to speak of such things! Why, you and I, before we were married, didn't know—still, there's no use harking back to our girlhood. And as for the things she says! . . . Yesterday I was speaking of the Rev. Mr. Tait, and she said: 'I haven't any use for Tait; he has no guts to him.'"

Mrs. Childs was mildly horrified. "But it's only bad taste," she excused her niece. She was fond of this poor, troubled sister-in-law of hers—but really, what was the use of fussing so over mere bad taste? Over really serious things, such as keeping that dreadful Mortimore about, Ellen didn't fuss at all! "How queer she is," Mrs. Childs reflected, impersonal, but kindly; then murmured that if

she had been unhappy about her children's slang, she'd have been in her grave by this time; "You should hear my boys! And, after all, Ellen, Fred's a good child, in spite of this thing she's done (you haven't told me what it is yet). She's merely like all the rest of them—thinks she knows it all. Well, we did, too, at her age, only we didn't say so. Sometimes I think they are more straightforward than we were. But I made up my mind, years ago, that there was no use trying to run the children on my ideas. Criticism only provoked them, and made me wretched, and accomplished nothing. So, as William says, why fuss?"

"Fred is my daughter, so I have to 'fuss.'"

"Well," said Mrs. Childs, patiently, "what is it?"

"Hasn't Laura told you? Mama says everybody is talking about it."

"No; she hasn't said anything."

"My dear, Freddy spent the night at the Inn, with Howard Maitland."

"*What!*"

"His car broke down—"

"Oh, an accident? You can't blame Fred for that. But why didn't they take the trolley?"

"They just missed the last car."

"Well, they were two careless children, but you wouldn't have had them walk into town, twelve miles, at twelve o'clock at night?"

"I certainly would! Freddy is always telling me I ought to walk to keep my weight down—so why didn't she walk home? And as for their being children, she is twenty-five and I am sure he is twenty-seven."

She paused here to wonder about Mr. Maitland: curious that he liked to live alone in that big house on the hill! Pity he hadn't any relatives—a maiden aunt, or anybody who could keep house for him. His mother was a sweet little thing. Nice that he had money.

"He ought to marry," said Mrs. Childs.

"Of course," said Mrs. Payton; and dropped young Maitland to go back to the Inn escapade: "Mama was so shocked when she heard about it that she thought William ought to go and see Mr. Maitland and tell him he must marry her. Of course, that is absurd—Mama belongs to another generation. Freddy did take the trouble to telephone me; but Flora took the message—poor Flora! she's so dissatisfied and low-spirited. I wish she'd 'get religion'—that keeps servants contented. Miss Carter says she's in love with one of the men at the livery-stable. But he isn't very devoted. Well, I was in bed with a headache (I've been dreadfully busy this week, and pretty tired, and besides, I had worked all the evening on a puzzle, and I was perfectly worn out); so Flora didn't tell me, and I didn't know Freddy hadn't come home until the next morning. It appears she was advising Mrs. McKenzie as to the size of her family, and when Mr. Maitland found he couldn't make his motor go, and told her they must take the trolley, she just kept on instructing Mrs. McKenzie! So they missed the car. She admitted that it was her fault. Well, then—oh, here is Mr. Weston!"

He came into the room, dusky with the fog that was pressing against the windows, like a slender shadow; a

tall, rather delicate-looking man in the late forties, with a handsome, whimsical face, which endeavored, just now, to conceal its boredom.

"Criminal not present?" he said, shaking hands with the two ladies and peering near-sightedly about.

"Oh, she's off with her dog, walking miles and miles, to keep from getting fat," Mrs. Payton said. She sat down at her tea-table, and tried, fussily, to light the lamp under the kettle. "It's wicked to be fat, you know," she ended, with resentful sarcasm; "I wish you could hear Fred talk about it!"

"I wish I could," Frederica's man of business said, lifting a humorous eyebrow; "I always like to hear Fred talk. Let me fix that lamp for you, Mrs. Payton. I hope I'm thin enough to be moral?"

The two ladies regarded him with maternal eyes, and Mrs. Childs recommended a glass of milk at bedtime.

"Be sure it is pasteurized," she warned him; "my William always says it's perfect nonsense to fuss about that—but I say it's only prudent."

"Must I pasteurize my whisky, too?" he said, meekly; "I sometimes take that at bedtime." It occurred to him that when he had the chance he would tell Freddy that what with pasteurized milk, and all the other improvements upon Nature, her children would be supermen; "they'll say they were evolved from us," he reflected, sipping his tea, and listening to his hostess's outpourings about her daughter, "as we say we were evolved from monkeys."

Not that Mrs. Payton—telling him, with endless illus-

trations, just how "impossible" her Freddy was—looked in the least like a monkey; she was a large, fair, dull lady, of fifty-seven or thereabouts, who never took any exercise, and credited the condition of her liver to Providence; but she was nearly as far removed from Miss Frederica Payton as she was from those arboreal ancestors, the very mention of whom would have shocked her religious principles, for Mrs. Payton was very truly and humbly religious.

"And church—Freddy never goes to church," she complained. "She plays tennis all Sunday morning. Rather different from our day, isn't it, Bessie? We children were never allowed even to read secular books on Sunday. Well, I think it was better than the laxity of the present. We always wore our best dresses to church, and—"

"May I have some more tea, Mrs. Payton?" her auditor murmured, and, the tide of reminiscence thus skilfully dammed, Freddy's offense was finally revealed to him. "Well," he said,—"yes, cream please; a great deal! I hope it's pasteurized?—they were stupid to lose the car. Fred told me all about it yesterday; it appears she was talking to some poor woman about the size of her family" —the two ladies exchanged horrified glances;—"of course, Maitland ought to have broken in on eugenics and hustled her off. But an accident isn't one of the seven deadly sins, and—"

"Oh," Fred's mother interrupted, "*of course* there was nothing wrong."

Mr. Weston looked at her admiringly; she really conceived it necessary to say such a thing! Those denied

ancestors of hers could hardly have been more direct. It occurred to him, reaching for another lump of sugar, that Frederica came by her talent for free speech honestly. "With her mother, it is free thought. Fred goes one better, that's all," he reflected, dreamily. Once or twice, while the complaints flowed steadily on, he roused himself from his amused abstraction to murmur sympathetic disapproval: "Of course she ought not to say things like that—"

"She is impossible!" Mrs. Payton sighed. "Why, she said 'Damn,' right out, before the Rev. Mr. Tait!"

"Did she damn Tait? I know him, and really—"

"Well, no; I think it was the weather. But that is nothing to the way she talks about old people."

"About me, perhaps?"

"Oh no; really, no! About you?" Mrs. Payton stammered; "why—how could she say anything about you?"

Arthur Weston's eyes twinkled. ("I'll make her tell me what it was," he promised himself.)

"As for age," Mrs. Childs corroborated, "she seems to have no respect for it. She spoke quite rudely to her uncle William about Shakespeare and Bacon. She said the subject '*bored*' her."

Mr. Weston shook his head, speechless.

"And she said," Mrs. Childs went on, her usual detachment sharpening for a moment into personal displeasure, "she said the antis had no brains; and she knows I'm an anti!"

"Oh, my dear," Fred's mother condoled, "I'm an anti, and she says shocking things to me; once she said the

antis were—I really can't say just what she said before Mr. Weston; but she implied they were—merely mothers. And as for her language! I was saying how perfectly shocked my dear old friend, Miss Maria Spencer, was over this Inn escapade; Miss Maria said that if it were known that Freddy had spent the night at the Inn with Mr. Maitland her reputation would be gone."

Mr. Weston's lips drew up for a whistle, but he frowned.

"I told Freddy, and what do you suppose she said? Really, I hesitate to repeat it."

"But dear Ellen," Mrs. Childs broke in, "it was horrid in Miss Spencer to say such a thing! I don't wonder Freddy was provoked."

"She brought it on herself," Mrs. Payton retorted. "Have another sandwich, Bessie? What she said is almost too shocking to quote. She said of my dear old friend—Miss Spencer used to be my school-teacher, Mr. Weston—'What difference does it make what she said about me? Everybody knows Miss Spencer is a silly old ass.' 'A silly old ass.' What do you think of *that?*" Mrs. Payton's voice trembled so with indignation that she did not hear Mr. Weston's gasp of laughter. But as she paused, wounded and ashamed, he was quick to console her:

"It was abominably disrespectful!"

"There is no such thing as reverence left in the world," said Mrs. Childs; "my William says he doesn't know what we are coming to."

"Youth is very cruel," Mr. Weston said.

Mrs. Payton's eyes filled. "Freddy is cruel," she said,

simply. The wounded look in her worn face was pitiful. They both tried to comfort her; they denounced Freddy, and wondered at her, and agreed with Mr. Childs that "nobody knew what we were coming to." In fact, they said every possible thing except the one thing which, with entire accuracy, they might have said, namely, that Miss Spencer was a silly old ass.

"When I was a young lady," Mrs. Payton said, "respect for my elders would have made such words impossible."

"Even if you didn't respect them, you would have been respectful?" Mr. Weston suggested.

"We reverenced age because it was age," she agreed.

"Yes; in those happy days respect was not dependent upon desert," he said, ruefully. (Mrs. Childs looked at him uneasily; just what did he mean by that?) "It must have been very comfortable," he ruminated, "to be respected when you didn't deserve to be! This new state of things I don't like at all; I find that they size me up as I am, these youngsters, not as what they ought to think I am. One of my nephews told me the other day that I didn't know what I was talking about."

"Oh, my dear Mr. Weston, how shocking!" Mrs. Payton sympathized.

"Well, as it happened, I didn't," he said, mildly; "but how outrageous for the cub to recognize the fact."

"Perfectly outrageous!" said his hostess. "But it's just as Bessie says, they don't know the meaning of the word 'respect.' You should hear Freddy talk about her grandmother. The other day when I told her that my

dear mother said that if women had the ballot, chivalry would die out and men wouldn't take off their hats in elevators when ladies were present,—she said, 'Grandmother belongs to the generation of women who were satisfied to have men retain their vices, if they removed their hats.' What do you think of that! I'm sure I don't know what Freddy's father would have said if he had heard his daughter say such a thing about his mother-in-law."

Mr. Weston, having known the late Andy Payton, thought it unwise to quote the probable comment of the deceased. Instead, he tried to change the subject: "Howard Maitland is a nice chap; I wonder if—" he paused; there was a scuffle on the other side of the closed door, a bellowing laugh, then a whine. Mrs. Childs bit her lip and shivered. Mr. Weston's face was inscrutable. "I wonder," he continued, raising his voice—"if Fred will smile on Maitland? By the way, I hear he is going in for conchology seriously."

"Mortimore is nervous this afternoon," Mrs. Payton said, hurriedly; "that horrid puppy worried him. Conchology means shells, doesn't it? Freddy says he has a great collection of shells. I was thinking of sending him that old conch-shell I used to use to keep the parlor door open. Do you remember, Bessie? Yes, Mr. Maitland is attentive, but I don't know how serious it is. Of course, I'm the last person to know! Rather different from the time when a young man asked the girl's parents if he might pay his addresses, isn't it? Well, I want to tell you what she said when I spoke to her about this plan of

earning her living (that's her latest fad, Mr. Weston), and told her that, as Mama says, it isn't *done;* she—"

"Oh, dear! There's the car coming," Mrs. Childs broke in, as the tinkle of the mules' bells made itself heard. "Do hurry and tell us, Nelly; I've got to go."

"But you mustn't! I want to know what you think about it all," Mrs. Payton said, distractedly; "wait for the next car."

"I'm so sorry, dear Ellen, but I really can't," her sister-in-law declared, rising. "Cheer up! I'm sure she'll settle down if she cares about Mr. Maitland. (I'm out of it!" she was thinking.) But even as she was congratulating herself, she was lost, for from the landing a fresh young voice called out:

"May I come in, Aunt Nelly? How do you do, Mr. Weston! Mama, I came to catch you and make you walk home. Mama has got to walk, she's getting so fat! Aunt Nelly, Howard Maitland is here; I met him on the door-step and brought him in."

CHAPTER II

LAURA CHILDS came into the quiet, fire-lit room like a little whirl of fresh wind. The young man, looming up behind her in the doorway, clean-shaven, square-jawed, honest-eyed, gave a sunshiny grin of general friendliness and said he hoped Mrs. Payton would forgive him for butting in, but Fred had told him to call for some book she wanted him to read, and the maid didn't know anything about it.

"I thought perhaps she had left it with you," he said.

Mrs. Payton, conscious, as were the other two, of having talked about the speaker only a minute before, expressed flurried and embarrassed concern. She was so sorry! She couldn't imagine where the book was! She got up, and fumbled among the *Flowers of Peace*. "You don't remember the title?"

He shook his head. "Awfully sorry. I'm so stupid about all these deep books Fred's so keen on. Something about birth-rate and the higher education, I think."

Mrs. Payton stiffened visibly. "I don't know of any such book," she said; then murmured, perfunctorily, that he must have a cup of tea.

Again Mr. Maitland was sorry,—"dreadfully sorry,"—but he had to go. He went; and the two ladies looked at each other.

"*Do* you suppose he heard us?"

"I don't believe he did!"

"Nice chap," said Mr. Weston.

On the way down-stairs the nice chap was telling Laura that he had caught on, the minute he got into that room, that it wasn't any social whirl, so he thought he'd better get out.

"They're sitting on Freddy, I'm afraid," Laura said, soberly; "poor old Fred!"

"Well, I put one over when I asked for that book! I bet even old Weston's never read it! Neither have I. But Fred can give us all cards and spades on sociology."

"She's great," Laura agreed; "but the book isn't so awfully deep. Well, I'm going back to root for her!"

She ran up to the sitting-room again, and demanded tea. Her face, under her big black hat, was like a rose, and her pleasant brown eyes glanced with all the sweet, good-natured indifference of kindly youth at the three troubled people about the tea-table. Somehow, quite unreasonably, their depression lightened for a moment. . . .

"No! No sugar, Aunt Nelly."

"Do you want to be as thin as I am, Miss Laura?" Arthur Weston remonstrated, watching her rub her cool cheek against her mother's, and kiss her aunt, and "hook" a sandwich from the tea-table. One had to smile at Laura; her mother smiled, even while she thought of the walk home, and realized, despairingly, that the car was coming —coming—and would be gone in a minute or two!

"My dear, your father says all this fuss about exercise is perfect nonsense. Really, I think we'd better ride,"

she pleaded with the pretty creature, who was asking, ruthlessly, for lemon, which meant another delay.

"I'll ring, Auntie; Flora will get it in a minute. Mama, I bet you haven't walked an inch this day! I knew you'd take the car if I didn't come and drag you on to your legs," she ended, maliciously; but it was such pretty malice, and her face was so gayly amiable that her mother surrendered. "The only thing that reconciles me to Billyboy's being too poor to give us an auto," Laura said, gravely, "is that Mama would weigh a ton if she rode everywhere. I bet you've eaten six cream-cheese sandwiches, Mama? You'll gain a pound for each one!"

"You'll be the death of me, Lolly," her mother sighed. "I only ate three. Well, I'll stay a little longer, Ellen, and walk part way home with this child. She's a perfect tyrant," she added, with tender, scolding pride in the charming young creature, whose arch impertinence was irresistible.

"Take off your coat, my dear," Mrs. Payton said, patting her niece's hand, "and go and look at my puzzle over on the table. Five hundred pieces! I'm afraid it will take me a week yet to work it out;"—then, in an aside: "Laura, I'm mortified that I should have asked Mr. Maitland the title of that book before you,"—Laura opened questioning eyes;—"so indelicate of Fred to tell him to read it! Oh, here's Flora with the lemon. Thank you, Flora. . . . Laura, do you know what Freddy is thinking of doing now?"

"Yes, the real-estate business. It's perfectly corking! Howard Maitland says he thinks she's simply great to

do it. I only wish *I* could go into business and earn some money!"

"My dear, if you will save some money in your own home, you will be just as well off," Mrs. Childs said, dryly.

"Better off," Mr. Weston ventured, "but you won't have so much fun. This idea of Fred's is a pretty expensive way of earning money."

"You know about it?" Mrs. Payton said, surprised.

"Oh, yes; she broke it to me yesterday."

"Just what is her idea?" Mrs. Childs asked, with mild impatience.

"Let me explain it," Frederica's man of business said . . . and proceeded to put the project into words of three letters, so to speak. Fred had hit on the fact that there are many ladies—lone females, Mr. Weston called them; who drift about looking for apartments;—"nice old maids. I know two of them at this minute, the Misses Graham, cousins of mine in Grafton. They are going to spend the winter in town, and they want a furnished apartment. It must be near a drug-store and far enough from an Episcopal church to make a nice walk on Sundays—*fair* Sundays. And it must be on the street-car line, so that they can go to concerts, with, of course, a messenger-boy to escort them; for they 'don't mean to be a burden to a young man'; that's me, I'll have you know! 'A young man'! When a chap is forty-six that sounds very well. Fred proposes to find shelters for just such people."

The two ladies were silent with dismay and ignorance. Laura, sucking a piece of lemon, and seeing a chance to

"LET ME EXPLAIN IT," FREDERICA'S MAN OF BUSINESS SAID . . . AND PROCEEDED TO PUT THE PROJECT INTO WORDS OF THREE LETTERS

"root," said, "How bully to have an office! I'm going to make her take me as office boy."

"The Lord only knows how she got the idea," Arthur Weston went on, "but it isn't entirely bad. I confess I wish her ambition would content itself with a post-office address, but nothing short of a real office will satisfy her. She has her eye on one in the tenth story of the Sturtevant Building; I am on the third, you know. But I think she can do it all on her allowance, though rent and advertising will use up just about all her income."

"I will never consent to it," Mrs. Payton said, angrily. "It is absurd, anyhow! Freddy, to hunt up houses for elderly ladies—*Freddy*, of all people! She knows no more about houses, or housekeeping, than—than that fire-screen! Just as an instance, I happened to tell her that I couldn't remember whether I had seventy-two best towels and eighty-four ordinary towels, or the other way round; I was really ashamed to have forgotten which it was, and I said that as soon as I got time I must count them. (Of course, I have the servants' towels, too; five dozen and four, with red borders to distinguish them.) And Freddy was positively insulting! She said women whose minds had stopped growing had to count towels for mental exercise. When *I* was a girl, I should have offered to count the towels for my mother! As for her finding apartments for elderly ladies, I would as soon trust a—a baby! Do you mean the Mason Grahams, Mr. Weston? Miss Eliza and Miss Mary? Mama knows them. You've met them, too, haven't you, Bessie? Well, I can only say that I should be exceedingly mortified to have the Misses

Graham know that any Payton girl was behaving in such an extraordinary manner The real-estate business! She might as well go out as a servant "

"She would make more money as a cook," he admitted. But he could not divert the stream of hurt and angry objections. Once Mrs. Childs said to tell Fred her uncle William would say it was perfect nonsense; and once Laura whispered to Mr. Weston that she thought it would be great sport to hunt flats for flatlings; to which he whispered back: "Shoal. 'Ware shoal, Laura."

There were many shoals in the distressed argument that followed, and even Arthur Weston's most careful steering could not save some bumps and crashes. In the midst of them the car came clattering down the street, and after a while went clattering back; and still the three elders wrangled over the outlaw's project, and Laura, sitting on the arm of her mother's chair, listened, giggling once in a while, and saying to herself that Mr. Weston was a perfect lamb—for there was no doubt about it, he, too, was "rooting" for Fred.

"I *must* go," Mrs. Childs said, at last, in a distressed voice. "No, Lolly, we haven't time to walk; we must take the car. Oh, Ellen, I meant to ask you: can't you join my bridge club? There's going to be a vacancy, and I'm sure you can learn—"

"Oh, my dear, I couldn't possibly! I'm so busy; I haven't a minute—"

"Well, think it over," Mrs. Childs urged. "And, Nelly dear, I know it will be all right about Fred. I'm sure William would say so. Don't worry!"

But when the door closed upon the escaping aunt and the sympathizing cousin, poor Mrs. Payton's worry overflowed into such endless details that at last her hearer gave up trying to comfort her. When he, too, made his escape, he was profoundly fatigued. His plea that Frederica should be allowed to burn her fingers so that she might learn the meaning of fire had not produced the slightest effect. To everything he said Mrs. Payton had opposed her outraged taste, her wounded love, her fixed belief in the duty of youth to age. When he ventured to quote that

> " . . . it was better youth
> Should strive, through acts uncouth,
> Towards making, than repose on aught found made,"

she said poetry was all very well, but that, perhaps, if the poet or poetess who wrote that had had a daughter, they would think differently. When she was reminded that she, too, had had different ideas from those of her parents, she said, emphatically, *never!*—except in things where they had grown a little old-fashioned.

"I don't believe, when I was a girl, I ever crossed Mama in anything more important than in little matters of dress or furnishings. . . . Oh, do look at my puzzle before you go!"

But Arthur Weston, almost dizzy with the endless words, had fled. Down-stairs, while he hunted for his hat and coat, he paused to draw a long breath and throw out his arms, as if he would stretch his cramped mind, as well as his muscles, stiffened by long relaxing among the cushions of the big arm-chair.

"Is there anything in this world duller than the pronunciamento of a dull woman!" he said to himself. On the street, for sheer relief of feeling the cool air against his face, instead of the warm stillness of Mrs. Payton's sitting-room, he did not hail the approaching car, but strolled aimlessly along the pavement, sticky with fog.

"I wonder if she talks in her sleep?" he said. "I don't believe she ever stops! How can Fred stand it?" He knew he couldn't stand it himself. "I'd sell pop-corn on the street corner, to get away from it—and from Andy's old stovepipe!" It occurred to him that the ideals set forth in Mrs. Payton's ceaseless conversation were of the same era as the hat. "But the hat would fit Fred best," he thought—"Hello!" he broke off, as, straining back on the leash of an exasperated Scotch terrier, a girl came swinging around the corner of the street and caromed into him so violently that he nearly lost his balance.

"Grab him, will you?" she gasped; and when Mr. Weston had grabbed, and the terrier was sprawling abjectly under the discipline of a friendly cuff on his nose, she got her breath, and said, panting, "Where do *you* spring from?"

It was Frederica Payton, her short serge skirt splashed with mud, and a lock of hair blown across her eyes. "He's a wretch, that pup!" she said. "I'll give him to you for a present."

"I wouldn't deprive you of him for the world!" he protested, in alarm. "Here, let me have the leash."

She relinquished it, and they walked back together toward Payton Street, Zip shambling meekly at their heels.

"Well," she said, thrusting a confiding arm in his, "were you able to move her? Or did she turn Aunt Bessie loose on you, too? I knew Aunt Bessie was to be asked to the funeral. I suppose she talked anti-suffrage, and quoted 'my William' every minute? Aunt Bessie hasn't had an idea of her own since the year one! Isn't it queer what stodgy minds middle-aged women have? I suppose you are about dead?"

"I have felt more lively. Fred, why can't you see your mother's side of it?"

"Why can't she see my side of it?"

"But she thinks—"

"But *I* think! What I object to in Mother is that she wants me to think her thoughts. Apart from the question of hypocrisy, I prefer my own." As she spoke, the light of a street lamp fell full on her face—a wolfish, unhumorous young face, pathetic with its hunger for life; he saw that her chin was twitching, and there was a wet gleam on one flushed cheek. "Besides," she said, "I simply won't go on spending my days as well as my nights in that house. You don't know what it means to live in the same house with—with—"

"I wish you were married," he said, helplessly; "that's the best way to get out of that house."

She laughed, and squeezed his arm. "You want to get off your job?" she said, maliciously; "well, you can't. I'm the Old Man of the Sea, and you'll have to carry me on your back for the rest of your life. No marriage in mine, thank you!"

They were sauntering along now in the darkness, her

arm still in his, and her cheek, in her eagerness, almost touching his shoulder; her voice was flippantly bitter:

"I don't want a man; I want an occupation!"

"But it isn't necessary, Fred. And besides, there are home duties."

"In our house? Name 'em! Shall I make the soap, or wait on the table and put Flora out of a job? Where people have any money at all, 'home duties,' so far as girls are concerned, are played out. Machinery is the cuckoo that has pushed women out of the nest of domesticity. I made that up," she added, with frank vanity. "I haven't a blessed thing to do in my good home—I suppose you heard that I had a 'good home'? which means a roof, and food, so far as I can make out. But as there is something besides eating and sleeping in this life, I am going to get busy outside of my 'good home'!"

He thought of the towels, but only murmured vaguely that there were things a girl could do which were not quite so—so—

"'Unwomanly'? That's Mother's word. Grandmother's is 'unladylike.' No, sir! I've done all the nice, 'womanly' things that girls who live at home have to do to kill time. I've painted—can't paint any more than Zip! And I've slummed. I hate poor people, they smell so. And I've taken singing lessons; I have about as much voice as a crow. My Suffrage League isn't work, it's fun. I might have tried nursing, but Grandmother had a fit; that 'warm heart' she's always handing out couldn't stand the idea of relieving male suffering. 'What!' she said, 'see a gen-

tleman entirely undressed, in his bed!' I said, 'It would be much more alarming to see him entirely dressed in his bed'!" She paused, her eyes narrowing thoughtfully; "it's queer about Grandmother—I don't really dislike her. She makes me mad, because she's such an awful old liar; but she's no fool."

"That's a concession. I hope you'll make as much for me."

"They were poor when she was a girl, and she had to do things—household things, I mean; really *had* to. So she has stuff in her; and, in her way, she's a good sport. But she is narrow and coarse. 'See a gentleman in his bed!' And she thinks she's *modest!* But poor dear Mother simply died on the spot when I mentioned nursing. So I gave that up. Well, I have to admit I wasn't very keen for it; I don't like sick people, dressed or undressed."

"They don't like themselves very much, Fred."

"I suppose they don't," she said, absently. "Well, nursing really wasn't my bat, so I have nothing against Mother on that lay. But you see, I've tried all the conventional things, and I've made up my mind to cut 'em out. Business is the thing for me. Business!"

"But isn't there a question of duty?" he said.

"Do you mean to Mortimore? Poor wretch! That's what Mother harps on from morning to night. What duty have I to Mortimore? I'm not responsible for him. I didn't bring him here. Mother has a duty to him, I grant you. She owes him—good Lord! how much she owes him! Apologies, to begin with. What right had she and 'old Andy Payton' to bring him into the world?

I should think they would have been ashamed of themselves. Father was old and dissipated; and there was an uncle of his, you know, like Mortimore. His 'intellect was there,' too, but it was very decidedly 'veiled'! I suppose Mother worked the 'veiled intellect' off on you?"

They had reached the Payton house by this time, and Frederica, her hand on the gate, paused in the rainy dusk and looked into Arthur Weston's face, with angry, unabashed eyes. "Don't talk to me about a duty to Mortimore!"

"I meant a duty to your mother. Think of what you owe your mother."

"What do I owe her? Life! Did I ask for life? Was I consulted? Before I am grateful for life, you've got to prove that I've liked living. So far, I haven't. Who would, with Mortimore in the house? When I was a child I couldn't have girls come and see me for fear he would come shuffling about." He saw her shoulders twitch with the horror of that shuffling. "It makes me tired, this rot about a child's gratitude and duty to a parent! It's the other way round, as I look at it; the parent owes the child a lot more than the child owes the parent. Did 'old Andy' and Mama bring me into this world for *my* pleasure? You know they didn't. 'Duty to parents'—that talk won't go down," she said, harshly, and snapped the gate shut between them.

He looked at her helplessly. She was wrong, but much of what she had said was right,—or, rather, accurate. But when, in all the history of parenthood, had there been a time when children accused their fathers and mothers

of selfishness, and cited their own existence as a proof of that selfishness! "Your mother will be very lonely," he said.

She shook her head. "Mother doesn't need me in the least. A puzzle of a thousand pieces is a darned sight more interesting than I am."

"You are a puzzle in one piece," he said.

"I'm not as much use to Mother as Father's old silk hat down in the hall; *I* never scared a burglar yet. I tell you what, Mother and I have about as much in common as—as Zip and that awful iron dog! Mother thinks she is terribly noble because she devotes herself to Mortimore. Mr. Weston, she enjoys devoting herself! She says she's doing her duty. I suppose she is, though I would call it instinct, not duty. Anyhow, there's nothing noble about it. It's just nature. Mother is like a cat or a cow; they adore their offspring. And they have a perfect right to lick 'em all over, or anything else that expresses cat-love. But you don't say they are 'noble' when they lick 'em! And cows don't insist that other cows shall lick calves that are not theirs. Mortimore isn't mine. Yes; that's where Mother isn't as sensible as a cow. She can give herself up all she wants to, but she sha'n't give me up. *I* won't lick Mortimore!" She was quivering, and her eyes were tragic. "Why, Flora has more in common with me than Mother, for Flora is at least dissatisfied—poor old Flora! Whereas Mother is as satisfied as a vegetable. That's why she's an anti. No; she isn't even a vegetable; vegetables grow! Mother's mind stopped growing when her first baby was born. Mother

and I don't speak the same language. I don't suppose she means to be cruel," she ended, "but she is."

"Did it ever occur to you that you are cruel?"

She winced at that; he saw her bite her lip, and for a moment she did not speak. Then she burst out: "That's the worst of it. I *am* cruel. I say things—and then, afterward, I could kick myself. Yet they are true. What can I do? I tell the truth, and then I feel as if I had—had kicked Zip in the stomach!"

"Stop kicking Zip anywhere," he admonished her; "it's bad taste."

"But if I don't speak out, I'll *bust!*"

"Well, bust," he said, dryly; "that's better than kicking Zip."

Her face broke into a grin, and she leaned over the gate to give his arm a squeeze. "I don't know how I'd get along without you," she told him. "Darn that pup!" she said, and dashed after Zip's trailing leash.

Arthur Weston, looking after her, laughed, and waved his hand. "How young she is! Well, I'll put the office business through for her."

CHAPTER III

SOMEHOW or other he did "put the office business through"; but the persuading of Mrs. Payton was a job of many days. So far as opinions went, he had to concede almost everything; of course Freddy's project was "absurd"; of course "girls didn't do such things" when Mrs. Payton was a young lady;—still, why not let Fred find out by experience how foolish her scheme of self-support was?

"It mortifies me to death," Mrs. Payton moaned.

"I don't like it myself," he admitted.

"What does Mr. Maitland say to it?"

"She says he says it's 'corking,'" Arthur Weston quoted; "I wish they would talk English! The smallness of their vocabulary is dreadfully stupid. They think it is smart to be laconic, but it's only boring. Do you think Fred cares about Maitland?"

"I wish she did, but she isn't—human! Rather different from my girlhood days! Then, a girl liked to have beaux. One of my cousins had a set of spoons—she bought one whenever she had a proposal. I don't think Freddy has had a single offer. I tell her it's because she cheapens herself by being so familiar with the young men. Not an offer! But I don't believe she's at all mortified. Well,

it's just part of the 'newness' of things. I dislike everything that is new! I wish Freddy would get married." . . .

"Why," Mr. Weston pondered, as, having wrung a reluctant consent from Mrs. Payton, he closed the door of No. 15 behind him, "why do we consider marriage the universal panacea?" But whether he knew why or not, he believed it was a panacea, and even plotted awkwardly to administer it to Frederica. Maitland was just the man for her; a good fellow, straight and clean, and with money behind him. The worst of it was that he could not be counted on to discourage Fred's folly; indeed, he seemed immensely taken by all her schemes; the more preposterous she was, the more, apparently, he admired her. He was as full of half-baked ideas as Fred herself! But there was this difference between them: Howard did not give you the sense of being abnormal; he was only asinine. And every first-rate boy has to be an ass before he amounts to anything as a man.

But Fred was not normal.

A week later, "*F. Payton*" had been painted on the index of the Sturtevant Building, and Arthur Weston, pausing as he got out of the elevator, glanced at the gilt letters with ironical eyes. He was about to let the panels of the revolving door push him into the street when Mr. William Childs entered and hooked an umbrella on his arm.

"Hey! Weston! Most interesting thing: do you recall the twenty-third Sonnet? You don't? Begins:

"'As an imperfect actor on the stage';

I've made a most interesting discovery!"

His prisoner, saying despairingly, "Really?" looked for a way of escape—but the crook of the umbrella held him.

"In a hurry? Hey? What? Well, I'll tell you some other time." Then the umbrella was reversed and pointed to the index. "Perfec' nonsense! What?"

"Girls are very energetic nowadays," Mr. Weston murmured, rubbing his arm.

"She'd better put her energy into housekeeping!"

"Then Mrs. Payton would have nothing to do."

"Well, then let her get married, and keep house for herself,—instead of laying down the law to her elders! She instructed me who I should vote for, if you please! Smith is her man, because he believes in woman suffrage. What do you think of that?"

"I think she's a good deal like you or me, when we want a thing put through."

"No such thing! Smith is the worst boss this state ever had. I told her so, and— Hey, there! Stop—I'm going up!" he called, wildly; and skipped into the elevator. "Tell her to get married!" he called down to Arthur Weston, who watched his ascending spats, and then let the revolving door urge him into the street. "There it is again," he ruminated, "'get married.' But girls don't marry for homes nowadays, my dear William. There are no more 'Clinging Vines.' Mrs. Payton is one of the last of them, and, Lord! what a blasted oak she clung to!" He had an unopened letter from Mrs. Payton in his pocket, and as he sauntered along he wondered whether, if it remained unopened for another hour or two, he could

lie truthfully to her and say he had not received it "in time" to come and talk over Freddy. "For that's what she wants, of course," he thought, dolefully; "it's a nice point of conscience. I'll go and sit in the park and think it out. By the time I decide, it will be too late to go—and then I'll open the letter! Why do women who have nothing to say, always write long letters?"—he touched the envelope with an appraising thumb and finger—"eight pages, all full of Freddy's sins!"

Rambling toward the park in the warm November afternoon Arthur Weston wondered just what was the matter with Fred. When, ten years before, he had gone abroad to represent the Payton interests in France (and, incidentally, to cure a heart which had been very roughly handled by a lady whose vocation was the collecting of hearts), Frederica had been a plain, boring, long-legged youngster, who disconcerted him by her silent and persistent stare. She was then apparently like any other fourteen-year-old girl—gawky, dull, and, to a blighted being of thirty-six, entirely uninteresting. When he came home, nine years later (heart-whole), to render an account of his Payton stewardship, it was to find with dismay that "old Andy," just deceased, had expressed his appreciation of services rendered by naming him one of the executors of the Payton estate, and to find, also, that the grubby, silent girl he had left when he went to Europe had shot up into a tall, rather angular woman, no longer silent, and most provokingly interesting. She was still plain, but she had one of those primitive faces which, while sometimes actually ugly, are, under the stress of certain

emotions, extraordinarily handsome. She was never pretty; there was too much thought in the jutting lines of her brow and chin, and her cheeks, smudged sometimes with red, sometimes rigidly pale, had no dimpling suggestion of a smile. Her gray, unhumorous eyes still held one by their nakedly direct gaze, even while a bludgeon-like truthfulness of speech made her hearers wince away from her.

Now, except for her rather tiresome slang, she never bored Arthur Weston; she merely bothered him—because he was so powerless to help her. He found himself constantly wondering about her; but his wonder was always good-natured; it had none of the bitterness which marked the bewilderment of her elderly relatives, or the very freely expressed contempt of her masculine cousins. Her man of business felt only amusement, and a pity which made him, at moments, ready to abet her maddest notions, just to give the wild young creature a little comfort. Yet he never forgot Mrs. Payton's pain; for, no matter whether she was reasonable or not, he knew that Freddy's mother suffered.

"I'd like to shake Fred!" he said; "confound it, I run with the hare and hunt with the hounds!"

In the park, in his discouragement at the whole situation, he sat down on one of the concrete benches by the lake, and looked at the children and nursery-maids, and at two swans, snow-white on the dark water. He wished he could feel that Fred was all right or her mother all wrong; but both were right, and both were wrong. Nevertheless, he realized that Fred's suffering moved him more than

Mrs. Payton's. Think of having the "veiled intellect" in the ell, "shuffling round" all the time! "But that's life," he reminded himself. Duty handcuffs all of us to our relations. Look at the historic Aunt Adelaide, who wouldn't take any of her beaux—there were more of them every time Mrs. Payton talked of Fred's shortcomings! Aunt Adelaide had turned her beaux down because of this thing called Duty, a word which apparently conveyed nothing whatever to the mind of her grandniece Miss Frederica Payton, who, however, had her own word—*Truth*. A word which had once caused her to describe Aunt Adelaide's self-immolation as "damned silly."

Mr. Weston, looking idly at the swans curving their necks and thrusting their bills down into the black water, felt that though Fred's taste was vile, her judgment was sound—it *was* silly for Aunt Adelaide to sacrifice herself on the altar of a being absolutely useless to society. Then he thought, uneasily, of the possible value to Aunt Adelaide's character of self-sacrifice. "No," he decided, "self-sacrifice which denies common sense isn't virtue; it's spiritual dissipation!"

Then his mind drifted to Laura Childs; Laura was not so hideously truthful as Fred, and her conceit was not quite so obvious; yet she, too, was of the present—full of preposterous theories for reforming the universe! Her activities overflowed the narrow boundaries of domesticity, just as Fred's did; she went to the School of Design, and perpetrated smudgy charcoal-sketches; she had her committees, and her clubs, every other darned, tiresome thing that a tired man, coming home from business, shrinks from

hearing discussed, as he would shrink from the noises of his shop or factory. "'The new wine's foaming flow'!—I should think Billy-boy would spank her," Weston thought, sympathetically. Furthermore, Laura detected, with affectionate contempt, the weak places in her elder's armor of pompous authority. He had heard her take off her father's "perfec' nonsense"! Her comments upon her mother's lazy plumpness were as accurate as they were disrespectful. Imagine girls back in the '70's, or even the '80's, doing such things! Yet Laura differed, somehow, from Fred; she was—he couldn't formulate it. He looked absently at the babies, and the nursery-maids, and then the dim idea took shape: you could think of Laura and babies together, but a baby in Frederica's arms was an anomaly. Why? After all, she was a female thing; you ought to be able to picture her with a baby. But you couldn't. "I wish," Arthur Weston began;—but before he could decide exactly what he wished, out of the brown haze across the park came young Maitland, swinging along, as attractive a chap as you would see in a day's work. He hailed the older man joyously, and, standing up before him with his hands in his pockets, began to josh him unmercifully.

"Is She late? I bet She's jealous of all these dames with white caps on! You should choose a more secluded spot."

"She is very late, Howard, and she will be later. She has got to have little curls in the back of her neck, and be afraid of sitting here without a chaperon. And she must have rubbers on, because there is no surer way of taking

cold than by having damp feet. And she must do all that all her great-aunts have done. I won't accept her on any other terms. So you see, I shall have to wait some time for her. In fact, I have given her up. Sit down. I want to talk to you."

Maitland sat down, and said he thought one of those hoop-skirted, ringleted damsels would be a good deal of a peach. "You see the photographs of 'em in old albums, and they certainly were pretty things."

"Howard, Freddy Payton's going into business. Did you know it?"

"Yes; she's a wonder!"

"She is," the other man agreed, dryly.

"I was talking to Laura Childs about her last night, and she told me how tough it was for her at home,—*you* know?"

Mr. Weston nodded.

"And her mother is an anti!" Howard said, sympathetically. "I've only seen Mrs. Payton once or twice, but it struck me she was the anti type. Not very exciting to live with."

"She does show considerable cerebral quietude," Weston admitted, chuckling.

"Did you ever make a call in the Payton house, and see old Andy Payton's silk hat on the hat-rack?"

"I have. But I'm not afraid of it;—there are no brains in it now."

"Well, I told Laura I thought she was the finest woman I knew," Maitland said, earnestly.

"Who? Lolly?"

"Heavens, no! Fred. She's no Victorian miss, I tell you what!"

"The Victorians would send her to bed on bread and water."

"I heard her make a speech to those striking garment-women," Fred's defender said; "she told 'em to get the vote, and their wages would go up. It was fine."

"Whether it was true is immaterial?"

Howard did not go into that. "And then, about morals; she talks to you just like another man. There's none of this business of pretending she doesn't know things. She knows as much about life as you or I."

"Oh, I don't pretend to know as much as you," Arthur Weston deprecated, lifting a humorously modest eyebrow.

"She talks well, too, doesn't she?" Howard rambled on; "I don't know what she's talking about sometimes, she's so confoundedly cultivated. The other day I said something about that nasty uplift play that they tried to pull off at the Penn Street Theater; and then I jerked myself up, and sort of apologized. And Freddy said, 'Go ahead; what's eating you?' And I said, 'Oh, well, I didn't know whether I ought to speak of that sort of thing.' And she said, 'Only the truth shall make us free.' That's out of the Bible, I believe."

Mr. Weston nodded. "I know the book. I've even read it, which is probably more than either you or Fred have done. I don't think it says the truth shall make you free—and easy; does it?"

Howard laughed, and got on his feet. "I'm going to beat up business for her. I took her round in my car to

look up apartments for those relations of yours. Why doesn't Mrs. Payton have a car? Haven't they money enough?"

"Oh, yes. But that poor creature, the brother, has to go out in a carriage. An auto would excite him, I suppose."

"I see. I told Fred she ought to have a little motor of her own, just as a matter of business."

"Hold on!" Frederica's trustee remonstrated, in alarm. "Take her in your car, if you want to, but please don't suggest one for her. She'd have to put a mortgage on her office furniture to pay for a week's gasoline! Look here, Howard—don't stand there like the Colossus of Rhodes, looking down at me as if I only weighed as much as one of your legs—tell me this: don't you see that this business of Fred's earning her living is perfectly artificial? She has a little income, and she can live on it; and when her mother dies, she'll have all the Payton money. So it is entirely unnecessary for her to go to work, to say nothing of the fact that she won't earn enough to buy her shoestrings."

"Oh, but," the young man burst out, "look at the principle involved! If you live on inherited money, you're a parasite. I know I do it myself," he confessed, frankly, "but I'm going to work as soon as I can get a job. I'm going in for shells. And I believe in work for a woman just as much as for a man. The trouble is that when a girl has money, there isn't any *real* work for her, so she has to manufacture an occupation—like this social-service stunt at the hospitals they're so hot on nowadays. Joe

Gould—he's an interne—he told me the most of 'em were nuisances. But, oh, how they enjoy it! They just lap it up. It makes me a little fatigued to hear 'em talk about it," he said, yawning. "Laura Childs doesn't talk much, but Gould says the patients like to have her come round, because she's good to look at. But with most girls it isn't real. And if a girl doesn't do real things, if she just amuses herself, she'll go stale, just like a fellow. Fred put that up to me," he explained, modestly. "I wouldn't have thought of it myself."

"I bet you wouldn't!" Arthur Weston said; "but don't you see? Fred's own occupation isn't real."

"She's rather down on me because I'm not in politics," Howard said, drolly; "did you ever notice that reformers don't take other people's stunts very seriously? Fred has no use for shells. Laura thinks my collection is great. But Fred says that it's only an amusement."

"You might do worse," the older man told him; "but never mind that. What I want to know is, why don't some of you fellows brace up and ask Freddy to marry you?"

"She wouldn't look at any of us. I don't know any man who could keep up with her mentally! You ought to hear her talk."

Mr. Weston raised a protesting hand. "Please! I've heard her."

Maitland laughed and strode off into the dusk, leaving Arthur Weston to sit and look at the swans. The nursery-maids and perambulators had gone; the Chinese pagoda on the artificial island showed a sudden spark of light, and

the arc-lamps across the park sputtered into the evening haze like lurching moons. The chill of the water and the night made him shiver. That youngster was so big and up-standing and satisfied with life! And certainly he was in love with Fred.

"Then she'll be off my hands," Fred's man of business said; "what a relief!"

And life looked as bleak and uninteresting as the cold dusk of the deserted park.

CHAPTER IV

"I NEVER see her from morning till night," Mrs. Payton said. "Rather different from my day! When I was a young lady, girls stayed indoors with their mothers."

Mrs. Payton's mother, stroking her white gloves down over her knuckly fingers, shrugged her shoulders: "You didn't like 'those days' so very much yourself, my dear. But of course Freddy is shocking. It isn't that she has bad taste—she has no taste! All I hope is that she won't publicly disgrace us. Bessie Childs says that her husband says this business idea is perfect nonsense."

The two ladies were in the double parlor on the left of the wide hall of No 15. It was a gloomy place, even when the ailanthus-trees had lost their leaves; the French windows were so smothered in plush and lace that the gleam of narrow mirrors between them could not lighten the costly ugliness. In its day the room had been very costly. The carpet, with its scrolls and garlands, the ebony cabinets, picked out in gilt—big and foolish and empty—the oil-paintings in vast, tarnished frames, must all have been very expensive. There was an ormolu clock on the black marble mantelpiece holding Time stationary at 7.20 o'clock of some forgotten morning or evening; the bronzes on either side of it—a fisher-maid with her string of fish,

and a hunter bearing an antelope on his shoulders—were dulled by the smoky years. Opposite the fireplace, against the chocolate-brown wall-paper, Andrew Payton, on a teakwood pedestal, glimmered in white marble blindness. Beside him, the key-board of a grand piano was yellowing in untouched silence. The room was so dim that Mrs. Holmes, coming in out of the sunshine, stumbled over a rug.

"You have such a clutter of things, Ellen," she complained, sharply.

"It's lighter up-stairs," Mrs. Payton defended herself.

"What did you say? Do speak more distinctly!"

"I said it was lighter up-stairs. Come up, and I'll show you a puzzle I've just worked out. Dreadfully difficult!"

But Mrs. Holmes never went up-stairs in the Payton house; to be sure, the door between the sitting-room and the room beyond it was always locked, but—*you heard things*. So she said she couldn't climb the stairs. "I'm getting old, I'm afraid," she said, archly.

"I suppose you are very rheumatic?" her daughter sympathized; "why don't you try—"

"Not at all!" the older lady interrupted; "just a little stiff. Mrs. Dale said her cousin thought you were my sister," she added, maliciously.

As far as clothes went, the cousin might have supposed Mrs. Holmes was Mrs. Payton's daughter—the skirt in the latest ugliness of style, the high heels, the white veil over the elaborate hair, were all far more youthful than the care-worn mother of Frederica (and Mortimore) would have permitted herself.

"I've been so dreadfully busy," Mrs. Holmes declared; "I meant to come in yesterday, but I had a thousand things to do! Bridge all afternoon at Bessie Childs's. I played with young Mrs. Dale. She ought to get another dressmaker."

"Did you know Mr. Dale's aunt was dying?" Mrs. Payton said.

Mrs. Holmes frowned. She was, as she often said, a very busy woman; she kept house, made calls, had "fittings," shopped, and read the newspapers. She did these things well and thoroughly, for, as her granddaughter had once said, she "was no fool." She was shrewd, capable, energetic, and entirely a woman of the world. Her daughter's social seclusion and mental apathy amazed and irritated her. But intelligent and busy as she was, she had leisure for one thing: *Fear*. She never said of what. Nor would she, if she could help it, allow the name of her Fear to be mentioned. "I always run away if people talk of unpleasant things!" she used to say, sharply. The mere reference to Mr. Dale's aunt made her pull her stole about her shoulders, and clutch for bags and card-cases that were always sliding off a steep and slippery lap.

"Why, Mama, you mustn't go," Mrs. Payton remonstrated, "you've just—"

"I only stopped a minute to say that if you don't keep Freddy in order, she will disgrace us all," Mrs. Holmes said, nervously; "but you keep talking about unpleasant things! I am all heart, and I can't bear to hear about other people's troubles."

Mrs. Payton understood; she gave her mother a piti-

ful look. ("I believe she'd like to live to be a hundred!" she thought; "whereas, if it wasn't for poor Mortimore I'd be glad to go; I'm so—tired. And Freddy wouldn't miss me.") All the while she was talking in her kind voice, of living, not dying; of her intention of starting in early this year on her Christmas presents—"I get perfectly worn out with them each Christmas!" Of her cook's impertinence—"servants are really impossible!" Of Flora's low-spiritedness—"Miss Carter says she's simply wild to get married, but I can't think so; Flora is so refined."

"Human nature isn't very refined," Mrs. Holmes said.

"Miss Carter says she wants to take music lessons."

"That's terribly refined," Mrs. Holmes said, satirically.

"It's absurd," her daughter declared, with annoyance; "music lessons! Rather different from the time I went to housekeeping—then, servants worked! I gave Flora a lovely embroidered collar the other day; and yet, the next thing I knew, Anne told me she was crying her eyes out down in the coal-cellar. I went right down to the cellar, and said, 'You *must* tell me what's the matter.' But all I could get out of her was that she was tired of living. Miss Carter says Anne says that Flora's young man has married somebody else, and she—"

"Don't mumble! It's almost impossible to hear you," her mother broke in; "as for servants, there are no such things nowadays. They have men callers, a thing my mother never tolerated! And they don't dream of being in at ten. My seventh cook in five months comes tomorrow."

"Don't you think you are rather strict—I mean about hours, and beaux, and all that sort of thing? My three all have beaux—only poor Flora's don't seem very faithful. Mama, don't you think you ought to see an aurist? You really are a little—"

"Not at all! I hear perfectly;—except when people mumble. And I shall never change; my way of keeping house is the right way, so why should I change?"

"I couldn't keep my girls a week if I were as strict as you," Mrs. Payton ventured.

"It wouldn't be much loss, my dear!" the older woman said; she ran a white-gloved finger along the top of the piano beside her, and held it up, with a dry laugh. "You could eat off the floor in my house; but you never were much of a housekeeper. However, I didn't come to talk about servants; I came to tell you that I am going to call on those cousins of Mr Weston's, and explain that at any rate *I* don't approve of my granddaughter's going into business!"

"I'm sure I don't, either!" poor Mrs. Payton protested. "I am dreadfully distr—"

"Why don't you tell her it isn't *done?* Why do you allow it?" Mrs. Holmes demanded.

Mrs. Payton raised protesting hands: "'Allow' Freddy?"

"If you'd stop her allowance, you'd stop her nonsense. That is what I would do if a daughter of mine cut such didos!"

"I can't—she's of age. You can't control girls nowadays," Mrs. Payton sighed.

"She ought to be married," said Mrs. Holmes, clutching at the back of a gilt chair as she got on to her shaking old legs; "though I can't imagine any nice man wanting to marry a girl who talks as she does. Maria Spencer told me she heard that Fred said that men ought not to be allowed to marry unless they had a health certificate."

Mrs. Payton gasped with horror. "Mama! are you *sure?* I can't believe— What *are* we coming to?"

"It mortified me to death," said Mrs. Holmes. ("Oh, do pick up that card-case for me!) I wish Arthur Weston would marry her, but I suppose he never got over that Morrison girl's behavior? No; the real trouble is, you insist on living in this out-of-the-way place! Oh, yes, I know; poor Mortimore. Still, the men won't come after her here, because it looks as if she had no money—that, and her queerness. Really, you ought to try to get her settled. You ought to move over to the Hill; but you love that poor, brainless creature up-stairs more than you do Fred!"

Mrs. Payton stiffened. "I love both my children just the same; and I can't discuss Mortimore, Mama, with anybody. As for being brainless, Doctor Davis always said, 'The intellect is *there;* but it is veiled.' " The tears brimmed over. "You don't understand a mother's feelings, Mama."

Mrs. Holmes shrugged her shoulders and brushed a powdered cheek against her daughter's worn face. "Good-by. Of course, you never take any advice—I'm used to that! If I wasn't the warmest-hearted creature in the

world I should be very cross with you. I suppose you are terribly lonely without Freddy?"

"Oh, terribly," said Mrs. Payton.

When Mrs. Holmes had gone, teetering uncertainly down the front steps to her carriage, Freddy's mother, pausing a moment in the hall to make sure that Mr. Andrew Payton's silk hat had been dusted, went heavily upstairs and sat down in her big cushioned chair. She wished that she had something to do. Of course, there was that new puzzle—but sometimes the thought of a puzzle gave her a qualm of repulsion, the sort of repulsion one feels at the sight of the drug that soothes and disgusts at the same moment. The household mending was a more wholesome anodyne; but there was very little of that; she had gone all through Freddy's stockings the day before, and found only one thin place. To-day there seemed nothing to do but sit in her soft chair and think of Freddy's shocking talk and how unkind Mrs. Holmes was about Mortimore. She knew, in the bottom of her heart, that her son's presence was painful to everybody except herself; she knew that Freddy didn't like to have people call, for fear they might see him, and that her reluctance dated back to her childhood. "But suppose she doesn't like it, what has that got to do with it?" Morty's mother thought, angrily; "it's a question of duty. Mama doesn't seem to remember that Freddy ought to do her duty!" It came over Mrs. Payton, with a thrill of pride, that she herself had always done her duty. Here, alone, with everything silent on the other side of the bolted door, she could allow her-

self to think how well she had done it! To Mortimore, first and foremost—she paused there, with a pang of annoyance at her mother's words: "I do *not* love him best!" she declared. She did her duty to Freddy, just as much as to Morty. When Fred had scarlet fever no mother could have been more devoted. She hadn't taken her clothes off for four days and nights! Her supreme dutifulness, however, a dutifulness of which she had always been acutely conscious, was in enduring Andrew's behavior. "Some women wouldn't have stood it," she thought, proudly. But what a good wife she had been! She had let him have his own way in everything. When he was cross, she had been silent. When he was drunk, she had wept—silently, of course. When he had done other things, of which anonymous letters had informed her, she had still been silent;—but she had been too angry to weep. She shivered involuntarily to think what would have happened if she had not been silent—if she had dared to remonstrate with him! For Andrew Payton's temper had been as celebrated as the brains which had once filled the now empty hat. "Some wives would have left him," she told herself; "but I always did my duty! Nobody ever supposed that I—*knew*." When Andrew died, and her friends were secretly rejoicing over her release, how careful she had been to wear the very deepest crape! "I didn't go out of the house, even to church, for three weeks, and I didn't use a plain white handkerchief for two years," she thought—then flushed, for, side by side with her satisfaction at her exemplary conduct was a rankling memory —a memory which made her constantly tell herself, and

everybody else, that she "loved both her children just the same." The remorse—for it amounted to that—began a few weeks after Mr. Payton's death, when Freddy, listening to her mother's pride in the black-bordered handkerchief, had flung out: "If you told the truth, you'd use a flag for a handkerchief, and you'd go to church to return thanks!"

There had been a dreadful scene between the mother and daughter that day.

"As for 'mourning' him," Andrew Payton's daughter said, "you don't. It's a lie to smother yourself in that horrid, sticky veil. You are mighty glad to get rid of him! You were as afraid as death of him, and you didn't love him at all. All this talk about 'mourning' is rot."

Mrs. Payton cowered as if her daughter had struck her: "Oh, how can you be so wicked!"

"Is it wicked to tell the truth?"

Mrs. Payton clasped and unclasped her hands: "I did my duty! But do you suppose I've been *happy?*" Her breath caught in a sob. "I've lived in hell all these years, just to make a home for you! I did my duty."

"I should have thought 'duty' would have made you leave him," Frederica said; "hell isn't a very good home for a child." She was triumphantly aware that she had said something smart; her mother's wincing face admitted it. "I suppose you were afraid to make a break while he was alive," she said, "but why not tell the truth now?"

Already the consciousness of self-betrayal had swept over Andy Payton's wife; her face flamed with anger. "You had no business to make me say a thing like that!

You only tell the truth to hurt my feelings. *You are just like Andrew!*" She looked straight at her daughter, her eyes fierce with candor. "I love Mortimore best," she said, in a whisper.

For a single instant they stared at each other like two strangers. The mother was the first to come to herself. "I—I didn't mean that, Freddy. I love you both alike. But it was wicked to speak so of your father."

"I was a beast to hurt your feelings!" Frederica said; "and I don't in the least mind your loving Mortimore best. But what I said about Father is true; his being my father doesn't alter the fact that he was horrid. Mother, you *know* he was horrid! Don't let's pretend, at any rate to each other."

Her face twitched with eagerness to be understood; she tried to put her arm around her mother; but Mrs. Payton turned a rigid cheek to her lips; and instantly Fred lapsed back into contempt of unreality. The fact was, the deed was done. Each had told the other the truth. Mother and daughter had both seen the flash of the blade of fact as it cut pretense between them. Never again would Mrs. Payton's vanity over duty done dare to raise its head in her daughter's presence: Freddy knew that, so far as her married life went, duty had been cowardly acquiescence. Never again would Frederica be able to fling at her mother her superior morality: Mrs. Payton knew she was cruel, knew she was "just like her father." . . . Like Andy Payton! She ground her teeth with disgust, but she could not deny it. She was so truthful that she saw the Truth; saw her father's intelligence in her own clear

mind; his ability in hers; his meanness in her ruthless smartness in proving a point. She hated him for these things—but she hated herself more.

Mrs. Payton told Arthur Weston of this revealing scene; but her confession confined itself to her remorse for having said she loved one child more than the other. "Of course I love them just *exactly* the same, but Freddy was wicked to speak disrespectfully of her father."

Then Frederica poured her contrition into his pitying ears.

"I was a beast, but I was not a liar."

"It isn't necessary to be a beast, to be truthful," he reminded her.

"I made her cry," she said. "Father used to do that. Do—do you think I'm like him?"

"Like your father? Good Lord, no!" he said, in horrified haste; then apologized. "I—I mean, Mr. Payton was a very able man, I had great respect for his brains; but he was—severe."

"'Severe'? Well, I'm 'severe,' I suppose? No; the trouble with me is, I'm hideously truthful—*and I like to be.*"

CHAPTER V

THE ridiculous part of Fred's dash for freedom was that she actually picked up a client or two! Of course, her commissions did not quite pay for the advertising that brought the clients—"But what difference does that make?" she demanded.

Arthur Weston, who had come up to the "office" on the tenth floor to check over a bill for her, said, "Oh, no difference, of course. You remind me of the old lady, Fred, who bought eggs for twenty-four cents a dozen and sold them for twenty-three cents. And when asked how she could afford to do that, said it was because she sold so many of them."

"I don't care," she said, doggedly; "when you begin you've got to put up something. I'm putting up my time. If I come out even—"

"You won't," he prophesied.

"Your old dames are coming to-morrow," she said. She had fastened Zip to the umbrella-rack and was sitting on her office table, showing a candid and very pretty leg in a thin silk stocking; she looked at him with the unself-conscious gaze of a child.

"They are to arrive at five, and I'm scared to death for fear that the walk to the Episcopal church is six feet short

of half a mile! I wish I had a motor to run around and look at places. Don't you think, as an investment, I could have a motor?"

"I do not!" he said. "Maitland made that alarming suggestion, and I told him not to put such ideas into your head."

"He's on the track of three Ohio girls who want five rooms and a bath, for light housekeeping, furnished. He's going to haul me round in his go-cart to look at some flats. Trouble is, I can't charge my full commission—they're poor. Students at the College of Elocution. Why do girls always want to elocute?"

"Why do they want to run real-estate offices? It's the same thing. Strikes me Howard hauls you round in his go-cart a good deal."

She shrieked with laughter. "Nothing doing! Nothing doing! I see your little hopeful thought. You've got me on your shoulders, like the aged Anchises, and you hoped that Howard might come to the rescue. Mr. Weston, I suppose your aunts, or cousins, or whatever they are, think I'm a freak?"

"Well, you are," he said; "I'll tell you what they think: they think (not having seen you) that you are a 'sweet girl who is doing something very kind for two old ladies.'"

"A 'sweet girl'! Me, a 'sweet girl'?"

"Don't worry. You're not."

"I suppose they think I am doing it to please you? Very likely they think I'm trying to catch you," she said, chuckling.

He looked at her drolly: "Well, you've caught me.

You are a perfect nuisance, Fred, but you do serve to kill time."

She slipped down from the table, her high-heeled, low-cut shoes clicking sharply on the floor, and, going over to the window, peered down into the cañon of the street. Zip scrabbled up, leaped the length of his leash, jumped, pounced, then put his nose on the floor between his paws and wagged his hindquarters. "No, sir!" she told him, "not yet!" And he crouched down again, patiently curling a furtive tongue over the toe of her shoe. "Howard was to come round for me in his car at four," she said. "Zip! Stop licking my shine off! I hate unpunctual people." Coming back to her caller, she fumbled in the pocket of her coat for her cigarette-case. "Have one?"

He helped himself and approved the quality.

"I offered Mr. Tait one," she said, "and his hair began to curl!"

"My hair is perfectly straight."

"That's the beauty of you. Yet Tête-à-tête couldn't have given a reason for his horror, to save his life."

"I could."

She was plainly disappointed in him. "I thought better of you than that! There's no 'right' or 'wrong' about it."

"No, of course there isn't," he agreed; and she applauded him. "But there is a very excellent reason, all the same, why a girl shouldn't smoke."

"What?" she demanded.

"Makes her less agreeable to kiss."

"Well, I'll wait till somebody wants to kiss me," she said, gayly; "when they do, I'll give up cigarettes—and

take to a pipe!" She pulled down the top of her desk and slipped the loop of the puppy's leash on her wrist. "As for smoking," she confessed, "I'm not awfully keen on it. Sometimes I forget to open my cigarette-case for days! But I have just as much *right* to do it as you have."

The defiance made him laugh. "That's like your sex, insisting that, because we make fools of ourselves, you will make fools of yourselves. That's your principle in demanding an unlimited suffrage."

But Fred was not listening. "I'm afraid you must clear out," she said; "Howard must be on hand by this time."

"I wonder when you'll earn the cost of that desk?" he mused, and looked about the office, with its one big window that muffled the roar of the city ten stories below, and framed, black against a lowering sky, the far-off circle of the hills. It was a gaunt little room, with its desk and straight chairs, and its walls hung with real-estate maps. A vision of Mrs. Payton's fire-lit upholstery flashed into his mind, and made him smile. What a contrast! "But this interests Fred," he thought; "and the petticoated easy-chairs don't. And the only thing that makes life endurable is an interest." He wondered, vaguely, what interests he had himself. Certainly his trustee accounts were not very vital interests! It occurred to him, watching Fred thrust some long and vicious pins through a very rakish hat, that when she settled down and married Maitland he would lose a distinct interest. "I'll have to transfer it to her infants," he thought, cynically; "I suppose I'll be godfather to the lot of 'em, and she and Howard, in

the privacy of connubial bliss, will speculate as to how much I'll leave 'em— Damned if I leave them anything!" he ended, with a flare of temper.

"Come on," said Fred.

They went down-stairs together, and waited in the cold for five minutes until Howard came, brakes on, against the curb, in a great hurry, but not in the least apologetic.

"I stopped to look at some shells at Beasley's," he vouchsafed as Fred was climbing into the car; then opened his throttle, and Mr. Weston, standing on the corner, watched them leap away down the crowded street.

"Look at him trying to cut in ahead of everybody!" he reflected; "but she thinks he's perfect."

If Fred believed her cavalier perfect, that did not keep her from criticizing his driving. Howard, too, was entirely frank, and told her her nose was red. After that they talked about the Ohio girls, and when they reached South G Street, leaving Zip on guard in the auto, he went all over the flat with her, and said the kitchenette was a slick place, but the bath-room was small—"and dark," he objected, following her in, and peering about at the plumbing. Then they decided that they had just time to whiz around to the apartment she had arranged for Arthur Weston's cousins. "They are to come to-morrow," she said.

If Mrs. Payton had seen her Freddy that afternoon, she would hardly have known her. No girl of Mrs. Payton's youth could have been more efficient as to dust; and certainly few young ladies of that golden time would have

made better arrangements for storing away the kindling, nor would they have trampled a negligent plumber more completely underfoot than did Frederica Payton. She had sent Howard flying in his car to bring the man, and she stood over him until he finished his job; then packed him and his kit out of the apartment and washed his horrid finger-marks off the white paint. In the parlor, she sat down on the sofa, drawing up her feet and snuggling back against the cushions.

"This is mighty nice," she said, looking around with a satisfaction as old as the cave-dweller's who hung skins on dripping walls and spread rushes over stone floors.

Howard, sprawling luxuriously in an arm-chair, regarded her with admiration. "It's funny that you can do *this* sort of thing," he waved an appreciative hand at the details of curtains and table-covers.

She shrugged her shoulders. "I'm in it for loot. If I'd thought they'd wanted a silk hat in the hall, I would have got it for 'em."

Howard roared. "That's where a woman's instinct comes in. I couldn't have fussed."

"Cut out woman's instinct," she commanded; "there's no such thing. To try to please a customer is only common sense. As for me, I hate all this domestic drool of tidies." And they both believed that she did!

They sat there—or, at least, Maitland sat, and Frederica reclined, for nearly an hour; the empty flat, the wintry dusk, the innumerable cigarettes, all fitted into their talk. . . .

At first Howard told her about the shells he had seen

at Beasley's. "I bought a *gloria-matis*," he said; "cost like the devil!"

Frederica frowned. "I don't see how you can bother with shells when the world is just buzzing with real things! For instance, Smith has come out for votes for women. Isn't that splendid?"

"He'd come out for votes for Judas Iscariot if it would put him in office," he said, sharply; "and let me tell you, Fred, research work, in any department of science, helps the world, finally, a blamed-sight more than most of this hot air that the reformers turn on. It isn't so showy, but one single man like Pasteur is of more permanent value than all the Smiths in our very corrupt legislature, boiled down!"

"Peeved?" she said, good-naturedly. "Why don't you say 'one single woman like Madame Curie'? Well, buy your old shells, if you want to!"

"I will," he said, grinning. "How's business?"

When she announced some small success, he said, wonderingly, "You are the limit!" And added what he thought of her pluck and her intelligence: "I never knew a woman like you!"

"All women are like me—when you let 'em out."

"No, they're not!" he contradicted, with admiring rudeness.

The rudeness pleased her, as, no doubt, the male cave-dweller's candor of fist or foot pleased the female cave-dweller. His praise and wonder were like wine to her. She wanted more of it. Curled up on the sofa, she grew more and more daring in her talk; her face, flushing with

excitement, was vividly handsome, and her mind was as vivid as her face; he could hardly keep up with her mind! She was an Intelligence to him, rather than a woman; and that was why he was totally unaware of anything unusual in the situation—the darkness and the solitude. There was absolutely no self-consciousness in him.

With her it was different—she was acutely self-conscious. Once a woman, bred in the tepid reticences of propriety, takes the plunge into free talk, the very tingle and exhilaration of the shock makes her strike out into still deeper water. . . . She talked about herself; of her life at home; of Mortimore—"He ought to have been killed when he was born," she said; "but, of course, he ought never to have been born."

"Of course," Howard said, gravely.

"It all came from ignorance on the part of women," she explained. "In Mother's day, people confused innocence with ignorance—and as a result, Mortimores were born. What do you think? The day Mother was married, her father said to her (she told me this herself!), 'Remember, Ellen, your husband's past life is none of your business.' Think of that! And poor Mother didn't know enough to know that it was the one thing that *was* her business!"

Her hearer concealed his embarrassed knowledge of that "past life" by nodding and frowning.

"From Mother's point of view," Frederica went on, contemptuously, "every vital thing is indelicate—I mean indecent," she corrected herself, with the satisfaction of finding a more striking word; "according to people like

Mother, a really refined baby would think it improper to be born!"

He laughed uproariously; he wished he could repeat that to Laura Childs, but of course he couldn't. However, the fellows would appreciate it. "As for babies," Fred said, with a shrug, "there's going to be lots of reform along that line. To merely rear children is a pretty poor job for an intellectual being. Did I tell you what I pulled off in a speech at our club? . . . '*The child is the jailer that has kept woman in prison.*' Don't you think that's pretty well put?"

"Bully," he said.

Then she told him that she had found a bungalow out on the north side of the lake—"the unfashionable side; that place they call Lakeville; all camps. You know? It's just beyond Laketon, where the nice, useless rich people go." She was going to hire it for the summer, she said, and take occasional days off from business, and get up a rattling good speech on woman suffrage—"and sex-slavery. The abolishment of that is what we're really working for, and it will come when we face Truth! Until now, women have been fed up on lies." She would live by herself: "I don't mean to have even a maid; I'm going to be on my own bat. I suppose Grandmother will throw a fit; she'll say, 'It isn't *done!*' That's Grandmother's climax of horror. She'd have said it to every Reformer who ever lived."

"You don't mean to say you'll stay there at night, all alone?" he said, astonished.

"Of course. Why not?"

"Won't you be frightened?"

"Frightened? What of? Would *you* be frightened?"

When he was obliged to admit that he would not be what you'd call frightened, "but a girl—"

"Rot! Why should a girl be frightened? I shall take a revolver."

After that, naturally, Feminism became the engrossing theme, bringing with it, as usual, those shallow generalizations that so often belittle this vital and terrible subject, even as creeds sometimes belittle Religion. To Fred's mind, as to many serious minds, Feminism had a religious significance; but she did not know—arrogance never does know!—the stigma her conceit put upon her cause.

"Look at the unrest of women, everywhere. I don't mean the agitation for suffrage;—that is just a symptom of it. It is yeast," she said, with passion; "yeast! We can't help it; something is fermenting; something is pushing us. All kinds of women feel it. I know, because I go round to the factories and talk to the girls at their noon hour, trying to get them to organize—that's the only way we can get the men to do what we want. Organization! Women have got to get together! I've made a door-to-door canvass for our league, and I came up against this—this, I don't know what to call it! this *stirring*, among women. Every woman (except fat old dames whose minds stopped growing when they had their first baby) is stirred, somehow. Twenty years from now the women who are girls to-day won't be putting picture puzzles together for want of something better to do." The contempt in her voice revealed nothing to Howard

Maitland, who scarcely knew the poor, dull lady in the sitting-room on Payton Street; but he wondered why Fred's face suddenly reddened. "No; girls are doing things! When they get to middle age their brains won't be chubby. Look at the factories. and shops, and offices —all full of women! Girls don't have to knuckle down any more, and 'obey'; they can say 'Thank you for nothing!' and break away, and support themselves. I tell you what! this life servitude that men have imposed upon women of looking after the home, is done, *done*, for good and all! That sweet creature, 'the devoted wife,' is being labeled 'kept woman,'—but the ballot is the key to her prison door!"

"Bully simile," he said.

"But isn't it all queer—the change in things?" she said, her voice suddenly vague and wondering; "it's a sort of race movement, with Truth as the motive power. It's bigger than just—people. Even our parlor-maid, Flora, feels it! She wants to do something; she doesn't know what. (I wish she'd put her energies into laundering the centerpieces better, but I regret to say she has a soul above laundry.) Yes, things are stirring! It's yeast."

Such talk was new to Howard. Until now, his young Chivalry had concerned itself only with women's demand for suffrage—which, as Frederica Payton had very truly said, is only a symptom, alarming, or amusing, or divine, as you may happen to look at it—of the world-unrest which she called "feminism." He was keenly interested.

"Gosh, Fred," he said, soberly, as she ended with the assertion that Feminism was the most interesting thing

that had come into the Race Conscienceness since humanity began to stand on its hind legs—"gosh, I take off my hat to you!" His admiration was not so much for the thing she was trying to do, as for the fact that she was trying! She was *doing* something—anything!—instead of sitting around, like most people, in observant and disapproving idleness. He forgot her snub about his shells; his eyes were ardent with admiring assent to everything she said. "You are the limit!" he said, earnestly.

And she, speaking passionately her poor, bare, ugly facts—all true, but verging on lies, because no one of them was the whole Truth—going deeper into her adventure of candor, felt, suddenly, a quickening of the blood. She had an impulse to put out her hand and touch him—the big, sprawling, handsome fellow! His voice, agreeing to all she said, made her quiver into momentary silence, as a harp-string quivers under a twanging and muting thumb. That his assents, which gave her such acute satisfaction, were merely her own convictions, thrown back to her by the sounding-board of his good nature, she did not realize. The intellectual attraction she felt in him was hers. The other attraction, which was his, she did not analyze. She realized only that something seemed to swell in her throat and her breathing quickened. The newness of the sensation threw her off the track of her argument, which was to prove that women would save society by facing facts—"facts" being, apparently, the single one of sex.

"When I marry," Fred said, "nobody's going to pull that devilish bromide on me, that the man's past isn't my business. There'll be no Mortimores in *mine!* I

mean to have children who will push the race along to perfection!"

"I bet they will!" he said.

She sat up on the sofa, cross-legged, clasping an ankle with each hand, her eyes glowing in the dusk. "You've given me a brace!" she said.

"You've given *me* one! I'd rather talk to you than any man I know."

She put out her hand impulsively, and he gripped it until the seal ring on her little finger cut into the flesh and made her wince with pain and break away; but with the pain there was a curious pang of pleasure. She got on her feet with a spring, and, rubbing her bruised finger, gave a last look about the apartment.

"I hope the tabbies will like it. Heavens, Howard, do you think they'll smell cigarette-smoke? I suppose they'd have a fit if they discovered that the 'sweet girl' smoked cigarettes!"

"Do they call you a 'sweet girl'?" he said, and roared at the idea.

"Mr. Weston doesn't like me to smoke. It gave me quite a shock to find he was such a 'perfect lady.'"

"Oh, well, he's old. What can you expect? I like you to. You knock off your ashes like a kid boy."

"Open the window a second, will you?" Fred said; "that smoke does hang around.—Howard, I believe they'll think I'm trying to lasso Mr. Weston into marrying me! Poor old boy, you know when he was young, before the flood, some girl turned him down, and I understand he's never got over it. The cousins will think I'm trying to

catch him on the rebound! Funny, isn't it, how the elderly unmarried female is always trying to make other people get married? I think it's a form of envy; sort of getting what you want by proxy. Men don't do it."

"Men are not so altruistic," he said.

Frederica's face bloomed in the darkness, rose-red. They went out to the elevator, and dropped down to the entrance in silence. Howard, cranking his car, and getting a slap on the wrist that made him bite off a bad word between his teeth, thought to himself that Fred Payton was a stunner!

He said so that night to Laura Childs, when they were sitting out a dance at the Assembly. They had talked about his *gloria-matis*, and she had thrilled at its cost, and pleaded with. him to show it to her. "I'm crazy to see it! Please!"

"Fred didn't care a copper about it," he told her, with some amusement. "She's sort of woozy on reforms."

Laura nodded. "Fred's great, perfectly great," she said, looking down at the toe of her slipper, poking out from her pink tulle skirt.

"She has a man's brain," he said.

"Now, why do men always say that sort of thing?" Laura objected, her eyes crinkling good-naturedly. "Brain has no more sex than liver."

Howard made haste to apologize: "'Course not! I only meant she's awfully clever, you know."

Laura agreed, a little wistfully: "I admire Fred awfully. Do you know, she talked to the girls in the rubber-factory out in Hazelton about the Minimum Wage? She wanted

me to go there with her, but I'd promised Jack McKnight to play tennis. Well, I'm afraid I wouldn't have gone, anyhow," she added, soberly; "those things bother Father, and it isn't as if I could accomplish anything, as Freddy can. If anybody asked me to make a speech, I should simply die. But Fred has no end of sand," Laura ended; her admiration was as honest as it was humble.

"Sand?" Howard said; "you bet she has sand! Why, she is going to take a bungalow out in Lakeville this summer, and live there all by herself. She wants to read and study, and all that sort of thing."

"By herself?" said Laura, really startled. "You don't mean without even a maid?"

"So she says."

"Aunt Nelly will never allow it! And, really, it wouldn't be safe. She ought to take Flora along, at least."

Upon which Howard boldly tried Fred's own argument: "Why shouldn't she be alone? She'll have a revolver."

"I wouldn't do it for a million dollars!" said Laura. "And, besides, nobody goes to Lakeville; it's awfully common."

"Fred is above that sort of thing," Howard said. For once the good-natured Laura was affronted.

"I don't pretend to be like Fred—" she began, but he interrupted her:

"You? Of course you're not like Fred! You couldn't do the things she does!"

Laura gave him a cool glance: "I promised this dance to Jack McKnight. Perhaps we'd better start in?"

"I'd like to wring his neck," Howard declared, rising reluctantly.

When she and Jack were half-way down the room she told him that there was a new engagement in the air. "The girl's perfectly fine, but the man makes me tired," said Lolly, lifting her pretty foot in the prettiest and daintiest kick imaginable.

"Tell us," Jack entreated, one hand holding hers, and the other spread over her young shoulder-blades.

"Oh, it isn't out yet," she said, "and I don't know that it's—really *on*—but I bet it—will be—pretty soon!"

And she tossed her head a little viciously.

CHAPTER VI

THE two Misses Graham were very much interested in their real-estate agent.

"A *girl*, to be in business," said the younger sister, doubtfully.

"It's very nice in her," said the elder sister. "I suppose the Paytons have lost their money and she has to support the family."

"She is certainly capable," Miss Mary admitted. "But it does seem strange for her to work in this way, when she could give music lessons, for instance."

"Perhaps she's not musical," Miss Eliza objected. "I hate to have a girl pounding the piano, when her talent lies in scrubbing floors." Miss Eliza Graham looked like a frayed old eagle; perhaps because for seventy years she had flapped unavailing wings against the Graham traditions.

Those traditions had kept her from the serious study of music, and later they had "saved" her from marriage with a man who had very little money. The younger Miss Graham looked, and was, as contented as a pouter-pigeon teetering about in a comfortable barn-yard. It was Miss Eliza, tall, thin, piercing-eyed, and sweet-hearted at seventy-two, who had, as she expressed it,

"dug Mary up," and brought her to town for the winter. Miss Eliza was for a hotel, but Miss Mary felt that unmarried ladies should have the dignity of their own roof. "We can always have the escort of a messenger-boy, if we go out in the evening," she told her sister, who agreed, her eyes twinkling.

"Excellent idea. We can spank him if he doesn't behave properly!"

"Oh, my *dear* Eliza!" Miss Mary protested, but she smiled indulgently. Eliza was the most precious thing in the world to the little, plump lady who made endless excuses to herself, and to everybody else, for "dear Eliza's ways." It was a "way" of Eliza's to forgive Youth for almost anything it did. . . .

"Of course, Youth makes Age uncomfortable," she would concede. "New wine is very hard on old bottles! But if the bottles burst, it isn't the fault of the wine, it is the fault of the bottles—*for having been empty!*" The significance of those last words was quite lost on Miss Mary.

As the two sisters went over their little apartment, and discovered its possibilities, old Miss Eliza's interest centered in the youth as well as the sex of their real-estate agent. "Look at that wood-box!" she said;—"to think of a girl having so much gumption!"

"Oh, dear!" said Miss Mary—and pointed a shrinking finger at the stub of a cigarette on the parlor window-sill, "I thought I smelt smoke; a workman must have left it."

But the cigarette was the only fly in the ointment. The

apartment, with its "art" finishings, electricity, and steam-heat, was to the country ladies and their one elderly maid-servant a miracle of beauty and convenience.

"Arthur was wonderfully wise in asking Miss Payton to attend to it for him," Miss Eliza said.

"I wonder if—it means anything?" Miss Mary queried, with an arch look. "After all, he must know her very well, to have told her just what we wanted—rooms and bath, and all that. It is rather intimate, you know."

"I *hope* it means something! I hope he has got over that wicked jilt, Kate Morrison!"

"Well, the Paytons are nice people," the younger sister said; "she was a Holmes, you know."

They were both eager to see dear Arthur and Miss Payton, for they felt sure they would know the moment they saw them together whether he had "got over" Kate. "When people are in love they always betray it," said Miss Eliza.

But when Mr. Weston brought Miss Frederica Payton to call, no "love" was betrayed on either side. In fact, the call was such an astonishing experience to the two sisters that they quite forgot their sentimental wonderings. Frederica accepted their thanks and appreciation very pleasantly, but a little bluntly. Oh, yes, the sunshine in the dining-room was very nice; she was glad they liked it. But she hoped they'd survive the jig-saw over-mantel and the awful tiles in the parlor. "They made me pretty sick," she said.

"Why, I thought the mantelpiece very artistic," Miss Mary said, blankly.

"The porcelain bath-tub is dandy," Fred said, with real pride.

"Dandy?" murmured Miss Eliza.

"It made me feel as if I could hardly wait for Saturday night to take a bath," the Real Estate Agent said. The two ladies looked startled—not at the antique joke, but to refer to bathing in Arthur's presence! "I mean the tub is bully," Fred explained; "and the plumbing—" Here she became so specific that her modest old clients grew quite red. She had been obliged to get a plumber in to work on the trap the afternoon before they came, but she was sure everything was all right now.

The door-bell rang at this moment, and while the Misses Graham, breathless under the shock of Miss Payton's thoroughness, welcomed (of all people!) old Mrs. Holmes, Fred was able to groan to Arthur Weston, "Can't we get out?"

"We cannot," he said, decidedly; "now brace up and be nice to your grandmother."

"*Oh*, Lord!" said Fred; but she was really very nice. She pecked at Mrs. Holmes's cheek through its white lace veil, and said "Hello, Grandma! How is anti-suffrage?" as politely as possible.

Of course, to make things pleasant for Mrs. Holmes, the Misses Graham repeated all their appreciation of Miss Freddy's efficiency. "She will make an admirable housekeeper," Miss Mary said, in her gentle way.

"She ought to," said Frederica's grandmother. "I'm sure I brought her mother up to know how to keep house! But it is just a fancy of Freddy's to do this sort of thing;"

she waved a knuckly white glove at the apartment, which caused Frederica to roll her eyes at Mr. Weston. "Of course, I know it isn't *done*, but it's an amusement for her," Mrs. Holmes explained, "and I have so much sympathy with young people—my daughter says I am all heart!—that I love to have the child amuse herself."

She was trying to preserve the Payton dignity, but she was very nervous; she could have said it all so much better if that pert creature had not been sitting there, her knees crossed, and displaying a startling length of silk stocking. She knew that no sense of propriety would keep Fred quiet if she took it into her head to contradict anybody, and she was glad when the two ladies changed the subject, even though it was for the gunpowdery topic of suffrage, on which, it appeared, the younger Miss Graham had strong feelings.

"I am sure female influence is not only more refining, but more effective than the ballot could possibly be," she said.

Of course Fred rushed in: "You're an anti?"

"Yes, my dear," Miss Mary said, smiling.

"To get things done by 'influence' is to revert, it seems to me, to the methods of the harem," said Fred, earnestly. Frederica was never flippant on this vital topic of suffrage, unless she was angry. Her grandmother's retort supplied the anger:

"Woman's charm will always outweigh woman's ballot," said Mrs. Holmes, with smiling decision. (She, too, was getting hot inside.)

"The antis," Fred flung back, "think that all that

is necessary is to 'sit on the stile, and continue to smile'!"

"What did you say?" said Mrs. Holmes, frowning. "Young people speak so indistinctly nowadays! We were taught proper enunciation when I was young."

"Woman," said Miss Mary, raising her voice, "is a princess, but her God-given rule lies in the gentle domain of the home."

"Gosh!" said Fred—and two of her auditors laughed explosively. But Frederica was red with wrath. "I've seen the 'princess' exercising her God-given rule in cleaning the floors of saloons on her hands and knees, because she had to support the children that her husband had foisted on her and then deserted. Do you think under such 'gentle circumstances' her charm would do as much for her as a vote?"

One does not know just how much of an explosion there would have been if the elder Miss Graham had not come to the rescue: "Ah, well, there are so many good reasons on both sides, that I'm glad I don't have to decide it!" Then she began to talk of old friends in Grafton; but, alas, as a subject Grafton, too, was somewhat dangerous; old Mr. So-and-so died two years ago; and Mrs. Black—did Mrs. Holmes remember Mrs. Black? "I am sorry to say she is very ill," Miss Mary said. The chatter of gossip was—as it so often is with age—a rehearsal of sickness and death. In the midst of it Mrs. Holmes clutched at a gold mesh-bag that was slipping from her steep lap, and tried to rise:

"I think I must go. (Oh, do pick up that bag, Freddy

dear.) I am too tender-hearted," she confessed, "I can't bear to hear unpleasant things!"

"Well, let us talk of pleasant things," Miss Eliza said; but she looked at the frightened old face under the white veil;—"and 'the feet of the bearers' are coming nearer to her every day!" she thought.

Mrs. Holmes sat down again, reluctantly. Of course, from the Misses Graham's point of view, there could be nothing pleasanter for a grandmother to hear than plaudits of Miss Freddy's efficiency; so they went back again to that. Dear Arthur had told them how hard she had worked (again Freddy's eyes rolled toward dear Arthur); engaging tradesmen, and making the landlord do the necessary repairing.—"Oh, my dear," Miss Mary interrupted herself, "I meant to warn you that one of your workmen left a half-smoked cigarette here. I knew you would want to reprove him. Dear me! in these days, with all the new ideas, the working-people are very careless. But I feel so strongly our responsibility to them, that I always tell them of their mistakes."

"The working-people didn't make any mistake this time," Fred said; "you mustn't blame the plumber,"—the temptation to get back at her grandmother was too much for her—"it was my own cigarette." There was a stunned silence. "Howard Maitland and I were smoking here quite a while," she said, sweetly. "But I thought I'd aired the room out. I'm awfully sorry,—cigarette-smoke does hang about so." ("'Amusement'!" she was saying to herself; "I'll 'amuse' her!")

But Mrs. Holmes was equal to the occasion. She shook

an arch and knobby finger at her granddaughter. "Naughty girl! But that's one of the things that is done nowadays," she said; "ladies smoke just as much as gentlemen, don't they, Mr. Weston?"

"More," he declared, gayly; but he watched his two cousins. Had they taken it in that Maitland and Fred had been in the flat together? It had apparently not struck Mrs. Holmes—or if it had, she chose to ignore it; she was talking, with a very red face, about all sorts of things. It seemed a favorable moment to drag his candid ward away, and he did so, with effusive promises to come again soon—all the time looking out of the corner of his eye at the Misses Graham's farewell to Fred. Alas, Miss Mary's were hardly visible.

But Miss Eliza followed them into the hall, and put a hand on Fred's arm: "I don't mind the smell of smoke in a room half as much as I do on a girl's lips," she said, smiling; "they ought to be like roses." Then she gave the angular young arm a little pat and ran back.

"What a duck she is!" Fred said, honestly moved; "I wish I hadn't let out at Grandmother!"

Her repentance did not soothe Arthur Weston. "I'd like to shake you," he said, as they got into the elevator.

"Me? What's your kick? I thought I behaved beautifully! I kissed an inch of powder off Grandmother's cheek. There's no satisfying you. I supposed you'd give me a bunch of violets, with 'For a good girl,' on the card. Don't be an old maid! Even Miss Graham isn't. She's a dear!"

"I may be an old maid, but you are an imp!" he said. In the taxi, as they rushed, with open windows, across the

city back to Payton Street, he spoke more gravely. "You ought not to have gone wandering around in vacant apartments with Maitland." He was really annoyed, and showed it.

Frederica was equally annoyed. "I am a business woman. Howard was obliging enough to take me around in his car. In the flat we talked for a while. Why shouldn't we? If he had been a girl, I suppose we could have sat there until midnight and you would have never peeped!"

"But may I call your attention to the fact that he's not a girl?"

"May I call *your* attention to the fact that there is such a thing, between men and women, as intellectual relations?" She was getting angry, and her anger betrayed her self-consciousness.

"You compel me," he retorted, "to remind you that there are other relations between men and women which are not markedly intellectual."

"There're none of that kind in mine, thank you! I—"

But he interrupted her, dryly: "Of course you know you had no business to do it. You remind me, Fred, of one of those dirty little boys who put a firecracker under your chair to make you jump. Look here, it's unworthy of a 'business woman' to do unconventional things simply because they are unconventional."

"I didn't!"

"You are like all the rest of your sex—self-conscious as hens when they see an automobile coming! You knew it was queer to shut yourself up there with that darned

fool, Maitland, *and that's why you loved doing it*," he flung at her. "That's the trouble with women nowadays; not that they do unusual things, but they are so blamed pleased to be unusual! And if they only knew it, they don't shock a man at all. They only bore him to death."

"I—"

"But I suppose you can't help it; you are so atrociously young," he ended, sighing.

Frederica was almost too angry to speak. "I am old enough to do as I choose!"

"Only Youth does as it chooses," he told her. "Reflect upon what I have said, my dear infant, and profit by it. . . . Stop at the iron dog!" he called to the driver. And the next minute Frederica, buffeted by the high, keen wind, ran past the dog, whose back was ridged with grimy snow, and, holding on to her hat with one hand, let herself into the hall with her latch-key.

"What's the matter with *him?*" she thought, slamming the front door behind her; "it isn't his funeral!"

CHAPTER VII

AT the jar of the banging door, Andy Payton's hat moved slightly on the hat-rack, and something snarled at the head of the stairs.

"It's nothing, Morty—only sister," a motherly voice said; and Miss Carter leaned over the baluster:

"I'm just bringing him down to his supper; he's a little nervous this evening."

"Oh," Fred said, shortly; "well, wait till I get out of the way, please." She stepped into the unlighted parlor, and stood there in the darkness, between the piano and the bust of Mr. Andrew Payton; as she waited, her hand fell on the open keyboard, and she struck a jangling chord. "Flora has been playing on the sly," she thought; "poor old Flora!" Then for a moment her fingers were rigid on the keys—the scrabbling procession was passing through the hall down to the room where Mortimore's food was given to him. When the door closed behind him she drew a breath of relief. She never looked at her brother when she could avoid it. As she went upstairs she paused on the landing to call out, "Hello, Mother!"

Mrs. Payton answered from the sitting-room: "Don't you want some tea, dear?"

Frederica hesitated; she didn't want any tea, but—"I suppose it pleases her," she thought, resignedly; and went into the pleasant, fire-lit room, with its bubbling teakettle and fragrance of Roman hyacinths blooming on the window-sills. "Finished your puzzle?" she asked, good-naturedly.

Mrs. Payton, grateful for a little interest, said: "No; I've been doing up Christmas presents most of the afternoon. I'm pretty tired! Tying all those ribbons is dreadfully hard work," she ended, with an air of achievement that was pathetic or ridiculous, as one might happen to look at it. Her daughter, glancing at the array of white packages tied with gay ribbons, did not see the pathos. That slightly supercilious droop of the lip which always made Mrs. Payton draw back into herself, showed Fred's opinion of the "hard work"; but she only said, laconically:

"Mr. Weston took me to call on the old maids. No, I don't want any tea, thank you."

"You oughtn't to call them 'old maids'; it isn't respectful."

"It's what they are—at least, the younger one is. The other one is very nice. But they are both of 'em of the vintage of 1830."

Mrs. Payton was sufficiently acquainted with her daughter's picturesque, but limited, vocabulary to know what "vintage" meant, so she said: "Oh, no; they are not so old as that. I don't think Miss Graham is much over seventy."

"I waked Miss Mary up!" Frederica said, joyfully.

"I am sorry for that," Mrs. Payton sighed.

Fred shrugged her shoulders. "Grandmother will tattle, —yes, she was there; deaf as a post, and all dolled up like a plush horse;—so I suppose I might as well tell you just what happened." She told it, lightly enough. "Old Weston threw fits in the taxi, coming home," she ended.

"I should think he might! Freddy, really—"

Her daughter looked at her with narrowing but not unkind eyes. "I wish I knew why people fuss so over nothing," she said.

Mrs. Payton put her empty cup back on the tray with a despairing sigh: "If you can't *see* the impropriety—"

"Oh, of course, I see what you call 'impropriety'; what I don't see is why you call it 'improper.' What constitutes impropriety? The fact that, as Grandmother says, 'it isn't *done*'? I could mention a lot of things that are done, that *I* would call improper! Wearing nasty false fronts, as Grandmother does, and silly tight shoes. A thing is true, or it's a lie. That distinction is worth while. But what you call 'impropriety' isn't worth bothering about."

"Truth and falsehood are not the only distinctions in the world. Things are fitting, or—not."

"Howard and I talked, in an empty flat," Fred said; "I suppose if it had been in our parlor, with the Egyptian virgin out in the hall chaperoning us, it would have been 'fitting'?"

Mrs. Payton wiped her eyes. "There's no use discussing anything with you. When *I* was a young lady, if my mother had reproved—"

Fred made a discouraged gesture: "Oh, don't let's go back to the dark ages. As for Howard—I'll see him at my office, if it makes you any happier."

"Why can't he call on you in your own house? You cheapen yourself by—"

"Mother, there's no use! I couldn't stand it. Mortimore—"

"*Frederica!*"

Mrs. Payton's gesture of command was inescapable. Involuntarily Fred's lips closed; when her mother spoke to her in that tone, the childish habit of obedience asserted itself. But it was only for a moment:

"Of course you don't mind him," she said; "you are fond of him. But you can't expect me to feel as you do." She drew in her breath with a shiver of disgust.

"I love you both just the same!" Mrs. Payton said, emphatically.

Frederica was not listening. "Oh, by the way," she said, "I've heard of a little bungalow, at that camp place, Lakeville—you know?—that I can rent for twenty-five dollars a month. I'm going to hire it for next summer—rather ahead of time, but somebody might grab it. I want to have a place to go, when I have two or three days off. I hope you'll come out sometimes. And—and Miss Carter can bring Morty," she ended, with generous intention.

Mrs. Payton was silent. She was saying to herself, despairingly, "She's jealous!"

"Well, I must go and dress," Frederica said, and got herself out of the room, acutely conscious of her mother's averted face. "'Cheapening' myself—how silly!" she

thought, as she closed her own door. When she took her cigarette-case out of her pocket, Miss Graham's words came into her mind and she smiled; but she lighted a cigarette and, standing before her mirror, practised knocking off the ashes. Was it this way? Was it that way? How does the "kid boy" do it? She tried a dozen ways; but she could not remember the entirely unconscious gesture which had pleased Howard Maitland. "How funny and old-fashioned old Miss Graham was! But quite sweet," she thought. It occurred to her, as she took out her hair-pins, that Miss Graham's antiquated ideas did not irritate her, and her mother's did. For a moment she pondered this old puzzle of humanity: "Why are members of your family more provoking than outsiders?" After all, Miss Graham, with her "roses," was just as irrational as Mrs. Payton with her fuss about propriety and "cheapness"—or Arthur Weston, gassing about "relations which are not markedly intellectual." She was angry at him, but that phrase made her giggle. She sat down on the edge of her bed, her brush in her hand, her hair hanging about her shoulders; it had been very interesting, that "cheap" and entirely "intellectual" hour alone with Howard in the darkening flat. . . .

She put her elbow on her knee, her chin in her hand, and smiled. Of course she knew what her mother, and Mr. Weston—"poor old boy!"—and her grandmother, and the Misses Graham all had in the back of their minds. "Idiots!" she said, good-naturedly. If they could have heard the plain, straight, man-to-man talk in the empty apartment, they would have discovered that nowadays men and

girls are not interested in those *un*intellectual relations at which her man of business had hinted. She remembered Howard's look when he said he would rather talk to her than to any man he knew—and she lifted her head proudly! No girly-girly compliment could have pleased her as that did. It was just as she had always said, the right kind of man knows that a woman wants him to talk horse sense to her, not gush. If the tabbies, and Mr. Weston, and her mother had heard that talk, they wouldn't worry about sentiment! Suddenly, she recalled that strange feeling she had had below her breastbone as she looked at Howard sprawling in the armchair. She remembered her curious impulse to touch him, and the rosy warmth that seemed to go all over her, like a wave; she thought of that pang of pleasure when his hand crushed hers so that the seal ring had cut into the flesh and hurt her. "I wonder—?" she said; and bit her lip. Then her face reddened sharply; she flung her head up like a wild creature who feels the grip of the trap.

Love?

For an instant she felt something like fright. "Of course not! He's just a bully fellow, and I like him. Nothing more; I don't—" She caught a glimpse of herself in the mirror, and the image held her eye. The vivid, smiling face, a little thin, with the color hot, just now, on the high cheek-bones; dark, wavy hair, falling back from a charming brow which, pathetically enough (for she was only twenty-five), had lines in it. "Heavens!" she said, "I believe I *do!*" She laughed, and, jumping to her feet, shook the mane of hair over her eyes. But before she began to

brush it she lifted the hand Howard Maitland had gripped, and kissed it hard, once—twice!

"I do—care," she said; "I didn't know it was like this!" She glowed all over. "*I am in love*," she repeated, amazed.

While she tumbled the soft, dark hair into a loose knot on the top of her head she tried to whistle, but her lips were unsteady. She did not know herself with this quiver all through her, and the sudden stinging in her eyes, and something swelling and tightening in her throat. She forgot the shocked old maids, and the disgusted trustee. She was in love! She began to sing, but broke off at a faint knock.

"Dinner's ready, Miss Freddy."

"Come in, Flora," Frederica called out; "and hook me up." She smiled so gaily at the silent creature, not even scolding when the slim, cold finger-tips touched her warm shoulder, that the woman smiled a little, too. "I thought this was your afternoon out?" Fred said, kindly.

"I 'ain't got no place in partic'lar to go. Anyway, I knew your ma wasn't goin' to be in, and—"

"I bet you played on the piano," Frederica said, smiling at herself in the glass.

"Well, yes'm, I did," the woman confessed. "I picked out the whole of 'Rock of Ages.'"

"Flora! Don't look so low-spirited; I believe you're in love. Have you got a new beau? I've been told that people are always low-spirited when they're in love."

Flora simpered; "Ah, now, Miss Freddy!"

"Come! Who is he? You've got to tell me!"

"Well, Mr. Baker's got a new man on. That there snide

Arnold's been bounced. Good riddance! He never did 'mount to nothing. Me, I'm sorry for the girl he married; she'll just slave and git no wages. That's what marryin' Arnold 'll do for her!"

"That's what marrying any man does for a woman," Miss Payton instructed her; "a wife is a slave."

But Flora's face had softened into abject sentimentality. "This here new man, Sam, *he's* something like. Light, he is; and freckled." Then her face fell: "Anne says he's got a girl on the Hill. Don't make no difference to me, anyhow. It's music I want. If I was young, I'd git an education, and go to one of them conservmatories and learn to play on the piano."

"I'll give you some lessons, one of these days," Fred promised her, good-naturedly. "Poor old Flora," she said to herself, as the maid, like a fragile brown shadow, slipped out of the room. "'He's got a girl on the Hill'! I wonder how I'd feel if Howard had 'a girl on the Hill'?" Again the tremor ran through her; she could not have said whether it was pain or bliss. "I certainly must teach Flora her notes," she said, trying to get back to the commonplace. Then she forgot Flora, and, bending forward, looked at herself in the glass for a long moment. "I'll get that hat at Louise's," she said, turning out the gas; "it's the smartest thing I've struck in many moons."

CHAPTER VIII

MR. WESTON, riding home in the taxi, was not without some astonishment at himself. Why was he so keenly annoyed at Fred's bad taste? Why had he such an ardent desire to kick Maitland? He might have gone further in his self-analysis and discovered that, though he wanted to kick Howard, he did not want to haul him over the coals, as a man of his years might well have done—merely to give a friendly tip as to propriety to a youngster whom he had seen put into breeches. Had he discovered this reluctance in himself, Arthur Weston might have decided that his indignation was based on a sense of personal injury—which has its own significance in a man of nearly fifty who concerns himself in the affairs of a woman under thirty. The fact was that, though he thought of himself only as her grandfatherly trustee, Frederica Payton was every day taking a larger place in his life. She amused him, and provoked him, and interested him; but, most of all, the pain of her passionate futilities roused him to a pity that made him really suffer. He could not bear to see pain. Briefly, she gave him something to think about.

His displeasure evaporated overnight, and when he went up to her office the next morning he was ready to

apologize for his words in the taxi. But it was not necessary. Fred, in the excitement of receiving a letter asking her fee for hunting up rooms, had quite forgotten that she had been scolded.

"I think I'd better advertise in all the daily papers!" she announced, eagerly.

"You're a good fellow," he said; "you take your medicine and don't make faces."

"Make faces? Oh, you mean because you called me down last night? Bless you, if it amuses you, it doesn't hurt me!"

The sense of her youth came over him in a pang of loneliness, and with it, curiously enough, an impulse of flight, which made him say, abruptly: "I shall probably go abroad in January. Can I trust you not to advertise yourself into bankruptcy before I get back?"

"Oh, Mr. Weston," she said, blankly; "how awful! Don't go!"

"You don't need me," he assured her; but a faint pleasure stirred about his heart.

"Need you? Why, I simply couldn't live without you! In the first place, my business would go to pot, without your advice; and then—well, you know how it is. You are the only person who speaks my language. Grandmother talks about my vulgarities, and Aunt Bessie talks about my stomach, and the Childs cousins talk about my vices—but nobody talks about my interests, except you. Don't go and leave me," she pleaded with him.

The glow of pleasure about his heart warmed into actual happiness. "Please don't think I approve of you!"

She looked at him with her gray, direct eyes, and nodded. "I know you don't. But I don't mind;—you understand."

"But," he said, raising a rueful eyebrow, "how shall I make Cousin Mary 'understand' your performances?"

"By staying at home and keeping me in order! Don't go away."

It was the everlasting feminine: "*I need you!*" There was no "new woman" in it; no self-sufficiency; nothing but the old, dependent arrogance that has charmed and held the man by its flattering selfishness ever since the world began.

He was opening the office door, but she laid a frankly anxious hand on his arm. "Promise me you won't go!"

He would not commit himself. "It depends; if you get married, and shut up shop, you won't want a business adviser."

"I sha'n't get married!" she said, and blushed to her temples.

Mr. Weston saw the color, and his face, as he closed her door and stood waiting for the elevator, dulled a little. "She's head over ears in love with him. Well, he's a very decent chap; it's an excellent match for her,—Oh," he apologized to the elevator boy, on suddenly finding himself on the street floor; "I forgot to get off! You'll have to take me up again." In his own office he was distinctly curt.

"I am very busy," he said, checking his stenographer's languid remark about a telephone call; "I am going to write letters. Don't let any one interrupt me"—and the door of his private office closed in her face.

"What's the matter with *him?*" the young lady asked herself, idly; then took out her vanity glass and adjusted her marcel wave.

Arthur Weston put his feet on his desk, and reflected. Why had he said what he did about going to Europe? When he went up to see Fred, nothing had been farther from his mind than leaving America. Well, he knew why he had said it. . . . Flight! Self-preservation! "Preposterous," he said, "what am I thinking of? I'm fond of her, and I'm confoundedly sorry for her, but that's all. Anyhow, Maitland settles the question. And if he wasn't in it—she's twenty-five and I'm forty-six." He got up and walked aimlessly about the room. "I've cut my wisdom teeth," he thought, with a dry laugh, and wondered where the lady was who had superintended that teething. For Kate's sake he had taken a broken heart to Europe. The remembrance of that heartbreak reassured him; the feeling he had about Fred wasn't in the least like his misery of that time. He gave a shrug of relief; it occurred to him that he would go and see some Chinese rugs which had been advertised in the morning paper; "might give her one for a wedding present?—oh, the devil! Haven't I anything else to think of than that girl?" He stood at the window for a long time, his hands in his pockets, looking at three pigeons strutting and balancing on a cornice of the Chamber of Commerce. "She interests me," he conceded; then he smiled,—"and she wants me to stay at home and 'take care of her'!" Well, there was nothing he would like better than to take care of Fred. The first thing he would do would be to

shut up that ridiculous plaything of an "office" on the tenth floor. Billy Childs put it just right: "perfec' nonsense!" Then, having removed "F. Payton" from the index of the Sturtevant Building, they—he and Fred—would go off, to Europe. He followed this vagrant thought for a moment, then reddened with impatience at his own folly: "What an idiot I am! I'm not the least in love with her, but I'll miss her like the devil when she marries that cub Maitland. She's a perpetual cocktail! She'd be as mad as a hornet if she knew that I never took her seriously." He laughed, and found himself wishing that he could take her in his arms, and tease her, and scold her, and make her "mad as a hornet." Again the color burned in his cheeks; he would do something else than tease her and scold her; he would most certainly kiss her. "Oh, confound it!" he said to himself, angrily; "I'm getting stale." He did *not* want to kiss her! He only wanted to make her happy, and be himself amused. "That is the difference between now and ten years ago," he analyzed. "Kate never 'amused' me; oh, how deadly serious it all was!" He speculated about Kate quite comfortably. She was married; very likely she had half a dozen brats. Again he contrasted his feeling for Fred with that brief madness of pain, and was cheered; it was so obvious that he was merely fond of her. How could he help it—she was so honest, so unselfconscious! Besides, she was pathetic. Her harangues upon subjects of which she was (like most of mankind) profoundly ignorant, were funny, but they were touching, too, for her complacent certainties would so inevitably bring her into bruising

contact with Life. "She thinks 'suffrage' a cure-all," he thought, amused and pitiful,—"and she's so desperately young!" In her efforts to reform the world, she was like some small creature buffeting the air. In fact, all this row that women were making was like beating the air. "What's it about, anyhow?" he thought. "What on earth do they want—the women?" It seemed to him, looking a little resentfully at the ease and release from certain kinds of toil that had come to women in the last two or three decades, that they had everything that reasonable creatures could possibly want. "Think how their grandmothers had to work!" he said to himself. "Now, all that these ridiculous creatures have to do is to touch a button—and men's brains do the rest." Certainly there is an enormous difference in the collective ease of existence; women don't have to make their candles, or knit their stockings, as their grandmothers did:—"yet, nowadays, they are making more fuss than all the women that ever lived, put together! What's the matter with 'em?"

He grew quite hot over the ingratitude of the sex. His old Scotch housekeeper, reading her Bible, and sewing from morning to night, was far happier than these restless, dissatisfied creatures, who, in the upper classes, flooded into schools of design and conservatories of music—not one in a hundred with talent enough to cover a five-cent piece!—and in the lower classes pulled down wages in factories and shops. "Amateur Man," he said, sarcastically. "Suppose we tried to do their jobs?" Then he paused to think what Fred's job, for instance, would be. Not discovering it offhand, he told himself again that if

women would keep busy, like their grandmothers—his contemptuous thought stopped, with a jerk; how could women do the things their grandmothers did? What was it Fred had got off—something about machinery being the cuckoo which had pushed women out of the nest of domesticity? "Why," he was surprised into saying, "she's right!"

He came upon the deduction so abruptly that for a moment he forgot his sore feeling about Frederica's youth. Suppose the women should suddenly take it into their heads to be domestic, and flock out of the mechanical industries, back to the "Home"? Arthur Weston whistled. "Financially," said he, candidly, "we would bu'st in about ten minutes." . . .

"Do you want to give me those prices to Laughlin before I go out to lunch?" a flat voice asked in the outer office; he slid into his desk-chair as the door opened.

"I haven't had time to look them up yet. Don't wait."

He took up his pen, but only made aimless marks on his blotting-paper; the interruption jarred him back into irritated denial of possibilities: "She amuses me, that's all; I'm not in the least—in love." Suddenly, with a spring of resolution, he took down the telephone receiver and called up a number. The conversation was brief: "Hello! Jim? . . . Yes; I'm Arthur. Look here, I want to break away for a week. . . . Yes—break away. B-r-e-a-k. I'm stale. Can't you go down to the marshes with me, for ducks? . . . What? Oh, come on! You're not as important as you think. . . . What? . . . I'll do the work—you just come along!"

There followed a colloquy of some urgency on his part, and then a final, satisfied "Good boy! Wednesday, then, on the seven-thirty."

He had hardly secured his man before he regretted it; the mere prospect of the arrangements he must make for the trip began to bore him. However, he sat there at his desk and made some memoranda, conscious all the time of a nagging self-questioning in the back of his mind. "*I'm not!*" he said, again and again. "I'll get some shooting and clear my brain up."

But by the time he had sent a despatch or two, and called Jim Jackson up a second time to decide some detail, he knew that shooting would not help him much. The nag had settled itself: he had accepted the revelation that he was "interested" in Freddy Payton. With the contrast between the pain of the old wound and the new, he would not use the word "love," but "interest" committed him to an affection, tender almost to poignancy. Of course there was nothing to do about it. He must just take his medicine, as Fred took hers, "without making faces." There was nothing to strive for, nothing to avoid, nothing to expect. She was as good as engaged to Howard Maitland, and it would be a very sensible and desirable match; —to marry a man of forty-six would be neither sensible nor desirable! No; the only thing left to her trustee was to take every care of her that her eccentricities would permit, guard her, play with her, and correct her appalling taste. "Lord! what bad taste she has!" Also, while he and Jackson were wading about on the marshes for the next week, kick some sense into himself!

That very evening, dropping in to the Misses Graham's and partaking of a bleakly feminine meal, he laid his lance in rest for her.

Miss Mary was full of flurried apologies at the meagerness of the supper-table, but old Miss Eliza said, with spirit, that bread and milk would be good for him! "Now, tell us about that child, Arthur," she commanded.

"You mean Fred Payton, I suppose?" he said, raising an annoyed eyebrow. "I don't call her a 'child.'"

"You are quite right," Miss Mary agreed, in her little neutral voice; "she is certainly old enough to know how to behave herself."

"It's merely that she wants to reform the world," Miss Eliza said, soothingly. "Reformers have no humor, and, of course, no taste;—or else they wouldn't be reformers!"

"Your dear cousin Eliza is too kind-hearted," Miss Mary said; but her own kind, if conventional, heart made her listen sympathetically enough to the visitor's excusing recital of the hardships of Fred's life.

Once, she interrupted him by saying that it was, of course, painful—the afflicted brother. And once she said she hoped that Miss Payton was a comfort to her mother —"though I don't see how she can be, off every day at what she calls her 'office'—a word only to be applied, it seems to me, to places where gentlemen conduct their business. When I was young, Arthur, a girl's first duty was in her home."

"Perhaps there is nothing for her to do at home," Miss Eliza said.

"There is always something to do, in every properly conducted household. Let her dust the china-closet."

"I'd as soon put a tornado into a china-closet as that girl! She ought to be turning a windmill," Miss Eliza said.

Her cousin gave her a grateful look, but the other lady was very serious. "I thought her manner to her grandmother most unpleasant. Youth should respect Age—"

"Not unless Age deserves respect!" cried Miss Eliza, tossing her old head.

Arthur Weston had seen that same flash in Fred's eyes. ("How young she is!" he thought.) But her sister was plainly shocked.

"Oh, my *dear* Eliza!" she expostulated. "I am not drawn to Mrs. Holmes myself, but—"

"Neither is Fred drawn to her," Weston interrupted; "and she is so sincere that she shows her feelings. The rest of us don't. That's the only difference."

"It is a very large difference," Miss Graham said; "this matter of showing one's feelings is as apt to mean cruelty as sincerity. It's the reason the child has no charm."

"I think she has charm," he said, frowning.

There was a startled silence; then Miss Eliza said, heartily: "Don't worry about her! Just now she thinks it's smart to put her thumb to her nose and twiddle her fingers at Life—but she'll settle down and be a dear child!"

Miss Mary shook her head. "If I were a friend of the young lady, I should worry very much. Maria Spencer called on us yesterday, and told us a most unpleasant

story about her. She spent the night at an inn with this same young man that she smoked with here. Oh, an accident, of course; but—"

"Miss Spencer is the town scavenger," Weston said, angrily.

Miss Mary did not notice the interruption. "I cannot help remarking that I do not think that such a young woman would make any man happy." ("It was difficult to bring the remark in," she told her sister, afterward; "but I felt it my duty.")

"The man who gets Fred will be a lucky fellow," her cousin declared.

"You know her very well, I infer," Miss Mary murmured. "I observe you use her first name."

"Oh, very well! And I knew her father before her. But the use of the first name is one of the new customs. Everybody calls everybody else by their first name. Queer custom."

"*Very* queer," said Miss Mary.

"Very sensible!" said Miss Eliza.

"Ah, well, we must just accept the fact that girls are not brought up as they were when—when we were young" —Arthur Weston paused, but no one corrected that "we." He sighed, and went on: "The tide of new ideas is sweeping away a lot of the old landmarks; myself, I think it is better for some of them to go. For instance, the freedom nowadays in the relations of boys and girls makes for a straightforwardness that is rather fine."

"Well," said Miss Mary, "I don't like what you call 'new ideas.' 'New' things shock me very much."

"I'm rather shocked, myself, once in a while," he agreed, good-naturedly.

"What will you do, Mary, when the 'new' heaven and the 'new' earth come along?" Miss Eliza demanded.

The younger sister lifted disapproving hands.

"As for the girls smoking," Weston said, "I don't like it any better than you do. In fact, I dislike it. But my dislike is æsthetic, not ethical."

"I hope you don't think smoking is a sign of the 'new' heaven," Miss Mary said; — but her sister's aside —"the Other Place, more likely!"—disconcerted her so much that for a moment she was silenced.

"I never could see," said Miss Eliza, "that it was any wickeder for a lady to smoke than for a gentleman; but, as I told the child, a girl's lips ought to be sweet."

"Her smoking is far less serious than other things," said the younger sister, sitting up very straight and rigid. "I do not wish to believe ill of the girl, so I shall only repeat that I do not think she will make any man happy."

"She will," Miss Eliza said, "if he will beat her."

"Oh, my *dear* Eliza!" Miss Mary remonstrated. Then she tried to be charitable: "However, perhaps she is engaged to this Maitland person, in which case, though her taste would be just as bad, her meeting him here would be less shocking."

"If she isn't now, she will be very soon," Frederica's defender said.

"Well," said Miss Mary, grimly, "let us hope so, for her sake; although, as I say, I do *not* feel that she—"

Miss Eliza looked at her cousin, and winked; he choked

with laughter. Then, with the purpose of saving Freddy, he began to dissect Freddy's grandmother—her powder and false hair; her white veil, her dog-collar—"that's to keep her double chin up," he said. "Yes! She is *very* lively for her age!" He wished he could say that old Mrs. Holmes was in the habit of meeting gentlemen in empty apartments—anything to draw attention from his poor Fred!

When he left his cousins, promising to come again as soon as he got back from his shooting trip, and declaring that he hadn't had such milk toast in years, he knew that he had not rehabilitated Frederica. "But Cousin Mary feels that she has done her duty in warning me. Cousin Eliza would gamble on it, and give her to me to-morrow," he thought; "game old soul! But even if Howard wasn't ahead of the game, the odds would be against me—forty-six to twenty-five—and, besides, what could I offer her? Ashes! Kate trampled out the fire."

CHAPTER IX

IN those next few weeks Fred Payton was a little vague and preoccupied. The revelation which had come to her in that moment before the mirror when she had kissed her own hand, remained as a sort of undercurrent in her thoughts, although she did not put it into words again. Instead, she added Howard Maitland to her daily possibilities: Would she meet him on the street?—and her eyes, careless and eager, raked the crowds on the pavements! Would he drop into her office to say he had fished up a client for her?—and she held her breath for an expectant moment when the elevator clanged on her floor. Would he be at the dance at the Country Club?—and when he cut in, and they went down the floor together, something warm and satisfied brooded in her heart, like a bird in its nest. Sometimes she rebuked herself for letting him know how pleased she was to see him; and then rebuked herself again: Why not? Why shouldn't she be as straightforward as he? Hadn't he told her he would rather talk to her than to any man he knew? She flung up her head when she thought of that; she was not vain, but she knew that he would not say that to any other girl in their set. She was very contented now; not even the ell room at 15 Payton Street seriously disturbed

her. The fact was, Life was so interesting she hadn't time to think of the ell room—Howard, herself, her business, her league! Yet, busy as she was, she remembered Flora's desire for music lessons, and every two or three days, before it was time to set the table for dinner, she stood by the togaed bust of Andy Payton, trying to teach the pathetically eager creature her notes. But the lessons, begun with enthusiasm, dragged as the weeks passed; poor Flora's numb mind—a little more numb just now because Mr. Baker's Sam had suddenly vanished from her horizon—could not grasp the matter of time. Fred's hand, resting on her shoulder, could feel the tremor of effort through her whole body, as the thin, brown fingers stumbled through the scales:

"Now! Count: One—two—three—"

"One—two—oh, land! Miss Freddy, I cain't."

"Yes, you can. Try again."

"Why don't you jest show me a tune?"

"You have got to know your notes first; and you've got to count, or you never can learn."

"I don't want to learn, Miss Freddy; I want to play! Oh," she said once, clutching her hands against her breast, "I *want* to play!" Her mournful eyes, black and opaque, gleamed suddenly; then a tear trembled, brimmed over, and dropped down on the work-worn fingers. "I cain't learn, Miss Freddy; I 'ain't got the 'rithmetic. I want to make music!"

Alas, she never could make music! The clumsy hands, the dull brain, held her back from the singing heights! "I cain't learn 'rithmetic," she said (sixteenth and thirty-

second notes drew this assertion from her); "and if I cain't play music without 'rithmetic, I might as well give up now."

"Well, you can't," Frederica said, helplessly. She had cut out the last quarter of her league meeting to come home and give Flora a music lesson. (Up-stairs, Mrs. Payton, listening to the thump of the scales, confided to Mrs. Childs that she didn't approve of Flora's playing on the piano. "The parlor is not the place for Flora," she said.) But, watched by Mr. Andrew Payton's marble eyes, the slow fingers went on stumbling over the keys, until Frederica and her pupil were alike disconsolate.

"You poor dear!" Fred said, at last, putting an impulsive arm over the thin shoulders; "try *once* more! And, Flora, Sam isn't the only man in the world. Come now, cheer up! You're well rid of Sam."

"Sam?" said Flora, her face suddenly vindictive; "I ain't pinin' for no Sam! He was a low-down, no-account nigger—" The door-bell rang, and she jumped to her feet. "I must git my clean apron!" she said; and vanished into the pantry.

Frederica waited, frowning uneasily; callers were not welcome at 15 Payton Street when Fred was at home—the consciousness of the veiled intellect up-stairs made her inhospitable. But it was only Laura and Howard Maitland, both of them tingling with the cold and overflowing with absurd and puppy-like fun.

"Feed us! Feed us!" Laura demanded; "we've walked six miles, and we're perfectly dead!"

"Pig!" said Fred; "wait till I yell to Flora. Flora!

Tea!" Her heart was pounding joyously, but with it was the agonizing calculation as to how long it would be before Miss Carter and her charge came clopping down the front stairs on their way to the room where Mortimore had his supper. "I don't mind Laura," Fred told herself, "but if Howard sees Morty, I'll simply die!"

"Don't you want me to light up?" Maitland was asking; and without waiting for her answer he scratched a match on the sole of his boot, and fumbled about the big, gilt chandelier to turn on the gas.

"I didn't know you played, nowadays," Laura said, looking at the open piano. "Gracious, Freddy, you do everything!"

"Oh, I'm only teaching poor Flora. She has musical aspirations. Howard, cheer up that fire!"

Tea came, and Laura said kind things to Flora about the music lessons; and then they all three began to chatter, and to scream at each other's jokes, Frederica all the while tense with apprehension. . . . ("Miss Carter won't have the sense to hold on to him; he'll walk right in!")

But, up-stairs, her mother, leaning over the balusters to discover who had called, had the same thought, and was quick to protect her.

"It's your Lolly," Mrs. Payton said, coming back to her sister-in-law; "and I think I hear Mr. Maitland's voice. I must tell Miss Carter to go down the back stairs with Morty." Having given the order, through the closed door between the two rooms, she sat down and listened with real happiness to the babel of young voices in the parlor. "I do like to have Freddy enjoy herself, as a girl in her

position should," she told Mrs. Childs; "just hear them laugh."

The laughter was caused by Howard's displeasure at Fred's story of some rudeness to which she had been subjected in canvassing for Smith—"The Woman's Candidate."

"If I'd been there, I'd have punched the cop's head!" he said, angrily.

Fred shrieked at his absurdity. "If he'd said it to *you*, you'd only think it was funny; and what's fun for the gander, is fun for—"

"No, it isn't," he said, bluntly.

"Howard," Laura broke in, "do tell Freddy the news!"

"It isn't much," he said, modestly; "I'm ordered off; that's all."

"Ordered off?" Fred repeated; "where?"

"Philippines," Laura said. "Government expedition. Shells and things. Starts Wednesday."

"I've wanted to go ever since I was a kid," Howard explained. "It's the Coast Survey, and I've been pulling legs all winter for a berth, and now I've got it. I came in to see you pipe your eye with grief at my departure."

"Grief? Good riddance! You lost me a client, taking me out to see those fool flats in Dawsonville. Have another cigarette. Lolly, how about you?"

"No," Laura sighed. "Billy-boy would have a fit if I smoked." She looked at Fred a little enviously. "I'm crazy to," she confessed.

"Oh, don't," Maitland said; "it isn't your style, Laura."

"Howard, do you really start Wednesday?" Fred said, soberly.

He nodded. "It's great luck."

"You'll have the time of your life," Laura assured him; "why do men have all the fun, Freddy?"

"Because we've been such fools to let 'em."

"Ladies wouldn't find it much fun—wading round in the mud," Howard protested.

"They ought to have the chance to wade round, if they want to!" Fred said—and paused: (was that Miss Carter, bringing Mortimore? Her breath caught with horror. She was sure she heard the lurching footsteps. No; all was silent in the upper hall).

Howard did not notice her preoccupation; he was pouring out his plans, Laura punctuating all he said with cries of admiration and envy. ("I'll *die* if Morty comes in!" Frederica was saying to herself.)

"You've got to write to me, Fred," Maitland charged her; "I haven't any relations—'no one to love me.' Do write me the news once in a while."

"You're off day after to-morrow?" she repeated, vaguely; it came over her, in the midst of that tense listening for the shuffling step on the stairs, that she would not see him again—he would go away, and she would not have had a word alone with him! She felt, suddenly, that she could not bear it. For a moment she forgot Mortimore. "If you don't go up-stairs and say how-do-you-do to Mother, Laura," she said, abruptly, "you'll get your-

HOWARD DID NOT NOTICE HER PREOCCUPATION. HE WAS POURING OUT HIS PLANS, LAURA PUNCTUATING ALL HE SAID WITH CRIES OF ADMIRATION AND ENVY

self disliked. And your mother is in the sitting-room, too." Even if Miss Carter and Morty appeared, she couldn't have Howard leave her like this!

Just for an instant, Laura's face changed; then she flung her head up, and said, "Oh, yes; I want to see Aunt Nelly. I'll be right back. (I'll give 'em a chance," she told herself, grimly.)

Up-stairs, she roamed about the sitting-room, sniffing at the hyacinths, and looking into the little, devout books, and even adding a piece or two to the picture puzzle on the table. Then she sympathized with Mrs. Payton's Christmas fatigue—"you oughtn't to give so many presents, Aunt Nelly!"

"Oh, my dear, it gets worse each year! People send me things, and of course I have to pay my debts. So tiresome."

"It's awful," said Laura; and straightened her mother's toque, and kissed her. "Darling, your hat is always crooked," she scolded, cuddling her cheek against her mother's. "Mama, we're going to have a suffrage parade, in April; will you carry a banner?"

"Oh, my dear!" Mrs. Payton protested. "One of those horrid parades here? I thought we would escape that!"

"Your father won't think of letting you walk in it, Laura," Mrs. Childs warned her, with amiably impersonal discouragement.

Laura's face sobered: "You make him let me, darling," she entreated.

Mrs. Payton looked at them enviously. Nobody hated those vulgar, muddy, unladylike parades more than she

did, but she knew, in the bottom of her heart, that if Freddy had snuggled against her, as Laura snuggled up to Bessie, she would almost have walked in one herself!

"Papa says those parades are perfect nonsense," Mrs. Childs said; "what good do they do, anyhow?"

"We stand up to be counted," Laura explained.

"Papa won't allow it," her mother repeated, placidly.

"I'm sure Mr. Weston will use his influence to prevent Freddy's doing it," said Mrs. Payton.

Then the two ladies exchanged their usual melancholy comments on the times, and Laura listened, making her own silent comments on one fallacy after another, but preserving always her sweet and cheerful indifference to their grievances. She looked at the clock once or twice—surely she had given Howard and Fred time enough! But she waited for still another ten minutes, then, coughing carefully on the staircase, went down to the parlor.

Her consideration was unnecessary. Howard, standing with his hands in his pockets, his back to the fire, had been telling Frederica that he was going in for conchology seriously. "I know you don't think shells are worth much," he ended, after giving her what he called a "spiel" as to why he was going and what he was going to do. "But to me conchology is like searching for buried treasure! I've been pawing round for a real job, and now I've got it. I don't have to earn money, so I can earn work! And I think research work means as much to the world as—as anything else. I wanted you to know it was a real thing to me," he ended, gravely.

"Shells aren't awfully vital to civilization," she said.

He made no effort to justify his choice; he had confessed the faith that was in him, but it was too intimate to discuss, even with so good a fellow as old Freddy. ("You can't expect a woman to understand that sort of thing," he told himself; "women don't catch on to science—except Laura. She sees the importance of it.") Then he broke out about Laura's hat. "Isn't it dinky?"

"Yes," Fred said, impatiently; they were talking like two strangers! "Howard, I hate to have you away in April. We're going to have our parade then, and I counted on you."

"What for?" he said, puzzled.

"To walk," she said, impatiently. His little start of astonishment annoyed her. "Perhaps you are glad to miss it?"

"I guess I am," he admitted, honestly. "I'm afraid I'd show the yellow streak."

She was plainly disappointed in him.

"'Course I believe in suffrage," he said, "but I hate to see a lot of ladies walking in the middle of the street."

"We're not 'ladies'; we're women."

"You're a lady, and you can't escape it. And I'd hate to see Laura do it," he added.

Fred had not a mean fiber in her, and jealousy is all meanness; but, somehow, she felt a stab of something like pain. She did not connect it with Laura; it was only because he was indifferent to what was so important to her—and to Laura, too. And because he was going away, and here they were, he and she, just being polite to each other!

"Laura and I don't enjoy the middle of the street," she said; "but I hope we won't funk it."

"*You* won't," he said; "you are the best sport going!"

Her face reddened with pleasure. "Oh, I don't know," she disclaimed, modestly.

It was at this moment that Laura's considerate delay ended. "I'm off!" she called, gaily, from the hall; "Howard needn't come until he is good and ready!"

He was ready in a flash. He gave Frederica's hand a hearty squeeze, then turned to help Laura down the front steps.

Fred closed the door upon them, and went back into the parlor. "*He is going away*," she said to herself, blankly. Her knees felt queer, and she sat down. "Well, at any rate, Morty didn't butt in; I couldn't have borne that." . . .

Out in the wintry dusk, the other two were silent for a while. Then Maitland said, "How *can* she stand that house?"

"She's perfectly fine," Laura said, loyally.

"She's a stunner," the young man declared; "I never knew anybody just like her. Big, you know. Straightforward. I take off my hat to Fred in everything!"

Laura gave him a swift look. ("Have they fixed it up?" she thought; "I gave 'em time enough!")

"But I wish she wouldn't mix up with Smith," he said.

"Smith believes in votes for women."

"What's that got to do with it? He's the worst kind

of a boss. As Arthur Weston says, to put Smith in to purify politics, is like casting out devils by Beelzebub, the Prince of Devils."

"Oh, well, we stand by the people who stand by us!"

"She's dead wrong," Howard said, carelessly, "but I hope she'll write to me when I'm away. I shall want to hear that Smith has been snowed under."

"Of course she'll write to you," Laura encouraged him. ("No, they can't have fixed it up. He wouldn't say that, if they were engaged.")

"Say, Laura, I suppose you—it would bore you to send me a postal once in a while? You might tell me how Fred's business is getting along."

"She can tell you herself. (Good gracious! She's turned him down! Poor old Howard!) I'm not very keen on writing letters, but I'll blow in a postal on you once in a while, to tell you that Fred is still in the market."

"I'd be awfully pleased if you would," he said, eagerly.

They were crossing Penn Park, and Laura, looking ahead, said, nervously: "See this dreadful person coming along the path! Is he drunk?"

"He certainly is," Howard said, laughing. She drew a little nearer to him—and instantly he had a friendly feeling for the lurching pedestrian!

"It frightens me to death to see a man like that," she said.

"He ought to be arrested," Howard said, joyfully—her shoulder was soft against his! "Not that he would hurt anybody—he's just happy."

"I'm not sandy, like Fred," she confessed.

"Oh, Fred would undertake to reform him," he agreed, laughing.

"Fred is—oh!" she broke off with a little shriek; the man, stumbling, had caught at her arm.

"*Ex*cuse me, lady, I—" Howard's instant grip on his collar spun him around so suddenly that the rest of the hiccoughing apologies were lost in astonishment; he stood still, swaying in his tracks, and gaping at the receding pair. "The dude thought I was mashin' his girl," he said, with a giggle.

"Did he touch you?" Howard said, angrily. He had caught her to him as he swung the man aside, and just for an instant he felt the tremor all through her. "I ought to have choked him!"

But she was laughing — nervously, to be sure, but with gaiety: "Nonsense! poor fellow—he stumbled! Of course he caught at my arm. Only just for a minute it frightened me—I'm such a goose!"

"You're not!" he said. But for the rest of the way to the Childses' house, he was very much upset. Laura had been scared, and it was his fault; he had taken the west path through the park, because that was the longest way home, and then he had bowled her right into that old soak! "I could kick myself for taking the west path," he reproached himself, again and again.

He hardly slept that night with worry over having made Laura Childs nervous. "She's the scariest little thing going!" he thought; "but she has sense." She had agreed with him in everything he said about the value of research work, and when he declared that science was

the religion of the man of intellect she had said, "Yes, indeed it is!" "That shows what kind of a mind she has," he thought; "but wasn't she cute about not smoking! Her 'father wouldn't let her.' Of course he wouldn't! A girl like that could no more smoke a cigarette than a—a rose could," he ended. This flight of fancy moved him so much that he made a memorandum to send Laura some roses the next day—"and old Fred, too; she's a stunning woman," he said, with real enthusiasm.

CHAPTER X

HOWARD MAITLAND'S departure in January for the Philippines surprised several people.

"Why should he take such a long journey?" Miss Mary Graham said to Miss Eliza—"unless it is that he discovered that Miss Payton is not the sort of girl to make any man happy, and simply left the country."

"I wager he carried a mitten with him!" Miss Eliza said.

"What! You think she refused him? Maria Spencer says she's only too anxious to get him. Meeting him in empty apartments! Perhaps that disgusted him. A gentleman does not like to be pursued." . . .

"Why has he gone away?" Mrs. Childs asked Laura, mildly interested.

"Because he wants to hunt for shells."

"But I thought he was so attentive to Freddy?"

"Maybe she turned him down."

"She'll get a crooked stick at last, if she doesn't look out," her father said, over the top of his newspaper.

Laura came and sat on the arm of his chair. "Fred doesn't need a stick, Billy-boy; she can walk alone."

"Every one of you needs a stick," Mr. William Childs assured her; "and I don't know that I would confine it

to the thickness of my thumb, either, as the English law does." He reached up a plump hand and pulled her ear. Afterward he told his wife that Lolly was down by the head: "What's the matter with her, Mother?" he said. His two sons might have failed in their various businesses, or taken to their beds with mumps or measles, and he would not have looked as anxious as he did when he heard the little flat note in Laura's voice. "Is she off her feed because I won't let her walk in that circus parade of Fred's?"

"Well, she's disappointed."

"I won't have a girl of mine tramping through the mud—"

"Perhaps it won't be muddy."

"It will! It always is. Anyway, I hope it will be. But if she is upset about it, I'll take her to St. Louis with me that week, so she won't feel she's backed out. Mother, you don't suppose *she's* missing that Maitland chap, do you? Hey? What?"

"Oh, dear me, no! Why, Mr. Maitland has been paying attention to Freddy for the last year."

"Why doesn't she take him, and stop all her nonsense? I hear she told those poor, silly strikers in Dean's rubber-factory to support Smith, the 'Woman's Candidate'! Much 'supporting' they can do! And the joke of it is, Smith himself owns the controlling stock. She had better be at home, darning her stockings."

"Oh, now, Father, you must remember it isn't as if Ellen didn't have plenty of servants to do things like that."

"I hear she's signed that petition to have certain kinds of diseases registered. *I* don't know what the world's coming to, that girls know about such things!"

"Well, of course, girls are more intelligent than they used to be."

"If she's so intelligent, I'll give her a book on Bacon-Shakespeare that will exercise her brains,—and she can stop concerning herself with matters that decent women know nothing about. Thank Heaven, our Laura is as ignorant as a baby! Or, if Fred is so bent on reforming things, let her have a Sunday-school class," said Mr. Childs, puffing and scowling. "Look here, Mother, if you have any influence over her, try and get her to take young Maitland. I should sleep more easily in my bed if I thought she had a man to keep her in order."

"But he has gone away," Mrs. Childs objected.

"That's because she has turned him down. Maybe he'll never think of her again; I wouldn't, if I were a young fellow! I'd want a *woman*, not a man in petticoats. But if he does get on her track again, tell her to take him; tell her I say she'll get a crooked stick if she waits too long. You're sure Laura isn't blue about him?"

"Now, Father! You are the most foolish man about that child! . . ."

"Why has Maitland gone on that expedition, Fred?" said Mr. Weston.

"You can search me," said Miss Payton.

Arthur Weston's hands, concealed in his pockets, tightened. "She has refused him!" he said to himself. (Alas!

shooting ducks on the marshes had not helped him!) He had dropped in at 15 Payton Street, and Fred had taken him up to the flounced and flowery sitting-room.

"Mother 'll be in pretty soon," she said; "so let's talk business, quick!" She was apparently absorbed in "business," which, as the winter thawed and drizzled into spring, flagged very much. "And the office rent goes right along, just the same," she told her trustee, ruefully. "I think, if I could have a little car to run around and look at places—"

"Maitland put that idea in your head!"

Frederica did not defend her absent adorer. Instead, she wailed over the rapacity of her landlord.

"You ought to have made your rent contingent on your customers," Mr. Weston teased her; and roared when she took it seriously and said she wished she had thought of it. "Give me some tea, Fred," he said; "these questions of high finance exhaust me." Then he asked the usual question, and Fred gave the usual answer. "But what do you hear from him?" Weston persisted. "I suppose you write to him occasionally? You mustn't be too cruel."

"Well, I don't hear much," she said. She took a letter out of her pocket and handed it to him.

When he had read it, he was silent for a while. ("If this is the sort of letter a blighted being writes," he reflected, "love has changed since my time.")

"*Dear Fred*," the letter ran, "*I'm having the time of my life. Tell Laura Childs I saw a shell necklace that she'd be perfectly crazy about. The dredging . . .*"

Then followed two pages about shells, which Mr. Weston, raising a bored eyebrow, skipped.

"*Those books you sent were bully. They look very interesting. I haven't had time to read them yet. Tell Laura they use boa-constrictors here instead of cats; and tell her that the flowers are perfectly wonderful.*"

Then came something about suffrage, ending with a ribald suggestion that the suffragists should get a Filipino candidate—"*He wouldn't cost so much as the chief of bosses, Mr. Smith; a Moro will root for 'votes for women' if you promise him a bottle of whisky.*"

"He is not losing sleep over being rejected," Arthur Weston thought, as he handed the letter back to her. . . . He had lost some sleep himself, lately: "And there's no excuse for it," he told himself; "I didn't *fall* in love, I strayed in—in spite of sign-posts on every corner! And now I'm in, I can't get out. Damn it, I will get out!" But each day it seemed as if he 'strayed' farther in. . . .

"Why has H. M. gone off?" Laura asked Frederica.

"Why, you know! Shells," Fred said, astonished at the question.

"Tell that to the marines. Freddy, you bounced him!"

"I did not."

"Well, then, if you didn't, what color are the bridesmaids' dresses to be?" Laura retorted.

"Get out!" said Frederica.

"Why has Mr. Maitland left town?" Mrs. Payton asked her daughter.

"Shells."

"Oh," Mrs. Payton said; "but I thought he—you— I mean, I supposed . . . Freddy, he's a nice fellow. I wish—"

"Oh, nice enough," Fred admitted, carelessly.

"She's refused him," Mrs. Payton thought; and sighed.

Even Flora had to ask her question: "Mr. Maitland has gone away, they say, Miss Freddy?"

"So I hear."

"Men," said Flora, heavily, "is always going away! Why can't they stay in one place, same as ladies?"

"They are not so important as we are," Miss Freddy assured her.

"If they was all swep' out of the world, it would be just the same to me," said Flora, viciously.

Fred kept a severely straight face; all the household knew poor Flora had had another disappointment.

"Why?"—"Why?"—everybody asked. But Frederica only thought "why." Her first feeling when he went away had been a sort of blank astonishment. Of course, it was all right; there was no reason he shouldn't go, only— "Why?"

Every day, as she worked at her desk, or took a trolley-car to the suburbs to inspect some apartment, or sat in absorbed silence opposite her mother at the dinner-table, she was saying, *why?* She was certain that he was fond of her. "Did he go because he thought I was so deep in business that I wouldn't bother with him? Or because

he wanted to show me he could put in really serious licks of work? Or because he was afraid I'd turn him down? Of course, I am awfully matter-of-fact," she admitted; "but all the same, he's blind if he thinks that!"

Sometimes, when her mother commented vaguely on the weather, or on Flora's indelicacy in being so daft about men, or Miss Carter's perfectly unreasonable wish to go to the theater once a week, besides her regular evening out—"*I* don't go once a year," Mrs. Payton said—Frederica would start and say, "Beg your pardon? I didn't hear you." Nor would she hear her mother's dreary sigh.

"Freddy has nothing in common with me," Mrs. Payton used to think, and sigh again. It did not occur to her to say, "I have nothing in common with Freddy." Certainly, they had nothing of mutual interest to talk about.... Mrs. Payton was wondering dully whether she had not better take a grain of calomel; why they would not eat cold mutton in the kitchen; whether Flora wouldn't be a little more cheerful now, for Miss Carter said that the McKnights' chauffeur was making up to her.... Fred was wondering how soon her last letter would reach Howard Maitland; foreseeing his interest in its contents—the news that Smith had been beaten, but pledged to the support of suffrage in his next campaign; calculating as to the earliest possible date of his reply..... Mrs. Payton was right; they had nothing in common. By and by, as the weeks passed, the mother and daughter, together only at meals, lapsed into almost complete silence.

"I love both my children *just* the same, but Mortimore

is more of a companion than she is," Mrs. Payton thought, bitterly.

There was, however, one moment, in April, when Frederica did talk. . . . Mrs. Holmes had come in to dinner, and somehow things started badly. Mrs. Payton had said, sighing, that she was pretty tired; "I really haven't got over the Christmas rush, yet," she complained. And Frederica, with a shrug, said that the Christmas debauch was getting worse each year. Then the suffrage parade was discussed. It had taken place the day before, in brilliant sunshine, and on perfectly dry streets, which greatly provoked Mrs. Holmes, who had prayed for rain. Naturally, she made vicious thrusts at the women who took their dry-shod part in it. She was thankful, she said, that William Childs had locked Laura up; anyhow, *she* hadn't disgraced the family!

"Do you call taking her to St. Louis 'locking her up'?" Fred inquired. "Laura gave in to Billy-boy, which was rather sandless in her. She is a dear, but she hasn't much sand."

"She has decency, which is better. To show yourselves off to a lot of coarse men—"

"Mr. Weston watched the procession."

"Only coarse women would do such a thing! And Arthur Weston might have had something better to do!"

Frederica held on to herself; she even refrained from quoting Mr. Weston's comment on the parade: "No doubt there were women in the procession who liked to be conspicuous; but there were others who marched with the consecration of martyrs and patriots!" But of course it

needed only a word to bring an explosion. The word was innocent enough:

"That Maitland boy," said Mrs. Holmes — "I've dropped my napkin, Flora; pick it up—why did he suddenly leave everything and go off?"

"Freddy says he's gone to dig shells," said Mrs. Payton.

"Dig what?" said Mrs. Holmes; "people mumble so nowadays, nobody can understand them! Oh, shells? Yes. Funny thing to do, but I believe it's quite the thing for rich young men to amuse themselves in some scientific way. I suppose it doesn't need brains, as business does."

"It isn't amusement," Frederica said; "it's work."

Upon which her grandmother retorted, shrewdly: "Anything you do because you want to, not because you have to, is an amusement, my dear. Like your real-estate business."

Frederica's lip hardened.

"However," Mrs. Holmes conceded, "to make his way in the world, a rich man, fortunately, doesn't need to be intelligent, any more than a pretty girl needs to be clever"—she gave her granddaughter a malicious glance; "all the same, young Maitland had better settle down and get married, and spend some of the Maitland money. (There goes my napkin again, Flora!)"

"I'd have no respect for him, if he did," Fred said. "He would be too much like this family—living on dead brains."

Her grandmother turned angry eyes on Mrs. Payton. "You may know what your daughter means, Ellen; I'm sure I don't!"

"I'll tell you what I mean," Frederica said, "you and Mother simply live on the money your husbands made and left you when they died. Since you were a girl, when you had to work because you were poor, you have never done a hand's turn to earn your living. Mother has never done anything. You are both parasites. Well, I am, too; but there's this difference between us: I am ashamed, and you are not. I am trying to do something for myself. But the only thing you two will do for yourselves will be to die." She looked at her speechless grandmother, appraisingly. "Yes, death will be a real thing to you, Grandmother. You can't get anybody else to do your dying for you."

"Ellen! *Really!*" Mrs. Holmes gasped out.

"Freddy, stop!" her mother said, hysterically.

"Well, what have either of you ever done to earn what you are at this moment eating?" Fred inquired, calmly.

Mrs. Payton was speechless with displeasure, but Mrs. Holmes, shivering from the chill of that word Fred had used, helped herself wildly from a dish Flora had been holding, unnoticed, at her elbow. "Ellen, I simply will not come here, if you allow that girl to speak in this way —before a servant, too!" she added, as Flora retreated to the pantry.

"I merely told the truth," Fred said, with a bored look.

"Well," said her grandmother, "then *I* will tell you the truth! You are a very unpleasant girl. And I don't wonder you are not married—no man would be such a fool as to ask you! A girl who cheapens herself by locking herself up in empty flats with any young man she

happens to meet, and signs indecent petitions, and rants in the public streets to a lot of strikers—why, you are not a *lady!* You are as plain as a pike-staff; and you have no manners, and no sense, and no heart—you've nothing but cleverness, which is about as attractive to a man as a hair shirt! Maria Spencer told me she expected you would be ruined; but I said I would think better of you if you were capable of being ruined, or if anybody wanted to ruin you. You are not a woman; you are a suffragist! That's why you haven't any charm; not a particle!"

"Thank Heaven!" Frederica murmured.

"Well, unless men have changed since my day," Mrs. Holmes said, shrilly, "a man wants charm in a woman, more than he wants brains."

"It is a matter of indifference to me what men want," Fred commented.

Her grandmother did not notice the interruption—"Though when *we* were young, some of us had brains and charm, too! There! That's the truth, and how do you like it? Ellen, why do you have your napkins starched so stiffly—they won't stay on your lap a minute!"

CHAPTER XI

"I NEVER noticed her looks," Howard Maitland was saying, as he and another member of the Survey Expedition lounged against the railing of their tubby little vessel and looked idly down on an oily sea. They had been talking about women—or Woman, as Frederica Payton would have expressed it; and, naturally, she herself came in for comment.

"Pretty?" Thomas Leighton had asked, sleepily. It was very hot, and the flats smelt abominably; both men were muddy and dripping with perspiration.

Howard meditated: "I never noticed her looks. She keeps you hustling so to know what she's talking about, that looks don't count. She says things that make you sit up—but lots of girls do that."

"They do. Boring after the first shock. But they enjoy it. It draws attention to 'em. Our grandmothers used to faint all over the lot, for the same purpose."

"Sometimes," Howard said, grinning, "when they get going about sex, I don't know where to look!"

"Look at *them*. That's what they want. And as most of 'em don't know what they're talking about, you needn't be uncomfortable. When they orate on Man's injustice to Woman—capital M and capital W—I get a little weary."

"I'm with 'em, there!" Maitland said.

The older man gave a grunt of impatience: "It isn't men who are unfair to women; it's Nature. But I don't see what can be done about it. Even the woman's vote won't be very successful in bucking Nature."

"I don't agree with you! Nature is perfectly impartial. Brain has no sex!"

"Nature impartial?" Leighton repeated, grimly; "Maitland, when the time comes for you to sit outside your wife's room, and wait for your first-born, you will not call Nature impartial. Theories are all very pretty, but just try waiting outside that door—" his face twitched; and Howard, remembering vaguely that Mrs. Leighton had been an invalid since the birth of their only child, changed the subject:

"Miss Payton's just sent me a cartload of suffrage literature; came on the tug yesterday."

"Suffragist?—you, I mean?"

"Yes; aren't you? Let's get in the flap of that sail."

"Do I look like a suffragist?" the other man demanded.

Howard surveyed him. "I don't know the earmarks, but you show traces of intelligence, so I suppose you are."

"I'll tell you the earmarks—in the human male: amiable youth or doddering age."

"You're not guilty on the amiability charge, and you don't visibly dodder. So I suppose you're an anti."

"Not on your life! It's a case of a plague on both your houses."

They were silent for a while, looking across the lagoon at a low reef where, all day long, the palms bent and

rustled in the hot wind; then Leighton broke out: "For utter absence of logic I wouldn't know which party to put my money on."

"Play the antis," Howard advised.

But the other man demurred. "It's neck and neck. Some of the arguments of the antis indicate idiocy; but some of the suffs' arguments indicate mania—homicidal mania! It's a dead heat. It's queer," he ruminated; "each side has sound reasons for the faith that is in it, yet they both offer us such a lot of—*truck!* One of the mysteries of the feminine mind, I suppose." He knocked the ashes out of his pipe on the deck-rail, and yawned. "As an example of 'truck,' I heard an anti say that for a woman to assume the functions of a man, and vote, was to 'revert to the amœba.' Can you match that? But, on the other hand, look at the suffs! My own sister-in-law (a mighty fine woman) told me that men 'were of no use except to continue the race.'"

"That's going some!"

"But of course," the older man said, "it is ridiculous to make sex either a qualification or a disqualification for the ballot; and it's absurd that my wife shouldn't have a vote when that old Portuguese fool from Gloucester, Massachusetts, who guts our fish and can't speak English so that an American dog could understand him—has it."

"That's just it!" Howard said, surprised at his fairness.

"Why multiply him by two?" Leighton said, dryly.

"We wouldn't be a democracy if we discriminated against the uneducated!"

"I don't. I discriminate against the unintelligent.

You'll admit there's a difference? Also, allow me to remind you that democracy is not the ballot; it's a state of mind."

"Very well!" Maitland retorted. "Make intelligence the qualification: the women put it over us every time! They are far more intelligent than men."

"I'd like to hear you prove it."

"That's easy! Girls can stay in school longer than boys, so they are better educated."

"But I'm not talking about schooling!" Leighton broke in; "I mean just common sense as to functions of the ballot. Let women ask for an intelligence qualification, and I'll be the biggest kind of a suff! But while they don't know any more about what the ballot can and can't do, than to gas about its raising woman's wages—oh, Lord!" he ended, hopelessly.

"Suffrage in itself is educating," Howard instructed him.

Leighton nodded. "It ought to be. But I can't see that it has perceptibly educated our fish-gutter. Still, you'd like to meet his wife at the polls?"

The suffragist hesitated: "When women get the vote, they'll change the election laws, and weed out the unfit."

Leighton lifted despairing hands: "When you say things like that, I feel like putting my money on the suffs! Mait, get out of the cradle! Our grandfathers made a mess of it, by dealing out universal male suffrage; and our fathers made a worse mess in giving it to the male negro; now the women want to make asses of themselves, just as we did. They are always yapping about being our 'equals.' They *are!* They are as big fools as we are.

Bigger, for they have the benefit of observing our blunders, and being able to avoid them—and they won't do it! Because Mr. Portugee has the ballot, Mrs. Portugee must have it, too. They say it wouldn't be 'fair' to leave her out. You'd think they were a parcel of schoolgirls! If women would ask for a limited suffrage, ask for the vote for my wife, so to speak—a vote for *any* intelligent woman, cook or countess!—I'd hold up both hands, and so would most men."

"It isn't practical."

"Practical enough, if we wanted to do it. And think what we could accomplish—the intelligent men, *and* the intelligent women! The people who buy and sell Mr. Portugee would be snowed under;—which is the reason the corrupt element in politics object to a limited suffrage for women! They need Mr. Portugee in their business, and rather than lose him, they'll take Mrs. P., too. So what's the use of talking? Votes for Women will come, in spite of all the antis in the land, for in this woman's scrimmage, though the antis have the charm, the suffragists have the brains; and brains always win, no matter how bad the cause! They'll get it—I'm betting that they'll get it in five years."

"You ought to hear Miss Payton talk about it," Maitland said; "she'd floor you every time. She's got a mighty pretty cousin," he rambled off; "*she* has charm."

"Suffragist?"

"Laura Childs? You bet she is! And she has brains. Not like Miss Payton, of course. But—" he straightened up, and his eyes began to shine; his description of Laura was so explicit that his companion smiled.

"Oh, that's the lay of the land, is it?" he said.

To which Howard responded by telling him to go to thunder. "Trouble with Miss Childs," he said, "is that the fellows are standing in a queue up to her father's door-steps, waiting to get a chance at her."

"Why did you step out of line?"

"I'll tell you the kind of a girl she is," Howard said, ignoring the question. "Of course, a man never would get stuck with Laura at a dance, but she's the kind, if she *thought* he was stuck, would make some sort of excuse—say she wanted to speak to her mother—so as to shake him. No man ever wants to get clear of Laura, but she's that kind of girl. That's why men hang round so."

"You evidently didn't hang round?"

Howard yawned. "Did I show you the pearl I found yesterday?" he asked, and produced, after much rummaging in his various pockets, a twist of paper. Leighton inspected the pearl without enthusiasm.

"Good so far as it goes. Hardly big enough for the ring."

Howard gave him a thrust in the ribs. "I'm going down to the cabin."

In his sweltering state-room he looked at his find, critically. "No, it isn't big enough," he decided. "Well, maybe I'll never have a chance to produce a ring," he added, dolefully; then he dropped the pearl into his collar-box, and mopped the perspiration from his frowning forehead. "Wonder if I shall ever be cool enough in this life to wear a collar?" he speculated. After all, why *had* he stepped

out of the line? "I wish I'd prospected before I left home!" Yet he realized that he had not known how much Laura counted in his life until he got away from her. Out here, "digging for buried treasure" in the blazing sun, lying on deck through velvet, starlit nights, the recollection of that "queue" lining up at Billy-boy's front door-steps had become first an irritation, and by and by an uneasiness. He had had one card from her,—"7° *above. Don't you wish you were as cold as we are?*" The photograph on the back revealed a snowy mountain-side that was tantalizing to a man who had nothing to look at but blazing, palm-fringed reefs, and who, for weeks, had been sweating at 104°. And it was not only the temperature that tantalized him—in the foreground of the picture were half a dozen of his set on skis. Laura, in a sweater and a woolly white toque, was putting a mittened hand into Jack McKnight's, to steady herself. Howard had not liked that card. "McKnight's got on his Montreal rig, all right," he thought, contemptuously; "he always dresses for the part!"

It was that postal which had aroused his uneasiness about the queue, and set him to counting the weeks until he could get into the line again. Also, it made him write rather promptly to Frederica Payton:

"*Hasn't Jack McKnight got any job? He's a pretty successful loafer if he can go off skiing all around the clock. Why doesn't Laura put an extinguisher on him? How is Laura? I suppose she and Jack are having the time of their young lives this winter.*"

It was well on in July before Fred's reply to that par-

ticular letter reached him, and it made him tell Tom Leighton that Miss Payton—"You remember I told you about her?"—was the finest woman he had ever known. "No sentimental squash about Freddy Payton!" This tribute was given because Fred had said:

"Laura hasn't confided in me, but I'm betting that she'll turn Jack McKnight down. He's not good enough to black her boots, and nowadays women demand that men—"

At this point Howard folded the letter and put it in his pocket. "Laura 'll bounce him!" he said to himself; and for the next hour he expatiated to Mr. Leighton upon the charm of common sense in a woman—the woman being Miss Payton, of whom his hearer was getting just a little tired; but he was confused, too. At the end of an hour his gathering perplexity found words:

"But I thought it was the pretty cousin you were gone on?"

"You did, did you?" Howard said. "Digging shells has affected your brain, Tommy."

CHAPTER XII

SPRING had sauntered very slowly up the Ohio Valley that year. During a cold and slushy April, Frederica paid her advertising bills, and was assured that the Misses Graham would want her to engage an apartment for them in the autumn. Also, she found a flat for a lady with strikingly golden hair, who later departed without paying her rent. This created a disgruntled landlord and instructed the real-estate agent in the range of adjectives disgruntled landlords can use. In May she was almost busy in finding houses on the lake and in the mountains for summer residents; but her traveling expenses to and from the various localities were so large that she had to apply to her man of business for an advance from her allowance.

"Look here, Fred," he said, "you can't live on your future commission from Cousin Eliza. Don't you think you've had about enough of this kind of thing?"

"I do not!" she said. "You can sponge my head between rounds, but you can't stop the mill. I don't pull off the gloves till I see it through. And I'm twenty-two dollars ahead of last month!"

She had induced him to go with her and Zip to see the tiny furnished cottage she had hired for the summer

in Lakeville—the cheerfully vulgar suburb of Laketon where persons of her own sort played at farming. Lakeville was only a handful of flimsy frame houses scattered along under the trees close to the sedgy edge of the lake. Wooden piers ran out into deep water, and, when the season opened, collected joggling fleets of skiffs and canoes about their slimy piles. As yet, the houses were unoccupied, but the spirit of previous tenants, as indicated by names painted above the doors—"Bide-a-Wee," and "Herestoyou"—had been very social. Sentimental minds were confessed in "Rippling Waves," and "Sweet Homes." Fred's "bungalow," its shingled sides weathered to an inoffensive gray, was labeled, over its tiny piazza, "Sunrise Cottage."

"I think that's why I took it," she told Mr. Weston, when, having inspected its shoddy interior and paused on the porch to look at the far-off church spire of Laketon, they wandered down to a ledge of rock that jutted out into the lake; "women are going to raise the sun of freedom!"

"I hope they won't, accidentally, raise Cain," he murmured. "Fred, the lamp on your center-table almost put my eyes out! Do the Lakevillians really think that kind of junk beautiful?"

"They do. But don't be cocky; we thought it beautiful ourselves not so very long ago—if it was only expensive enough! Look at the parlor in Payton Street."

"That magenta shade with the autumn leaves on it is the most horrible thing I ever saw," he said, shuddering.

"I shall have lots of candles and a student's lamp to mitigate it," she comforted him.

They had settled down on the rock, Zip dozing against Fred's knee. It was an exquisite May afternoon. Everything was very still; once a bird fluted in the distance, and once, on the piazza of a boarded-up cottage, a chipmunk scurried through the drift of last year's leaves. A haze of heat lay on the water that crinkled sometimes under a cat's-paw of wind, and then lapped faintly in the sedges. The woods, crowding close to the shore, were showing the furry grayness of young oak leaves, and here and there a maple smoldered into flame. Frederica, absently poking a twig under patches of lichen and flaking them off into the water, was saying to herself that in about six months Howard Maitland would be at home.

"Lakeville is so unnecessarily hideous," Mr. Weston meditated; "I can't see why you should like it."

"Because my friends come here—people who *work!* I'm going to start a suffrage club for them."

"How grateful they will be!" he said. His amiability when he was bored was very marked.

"But I had to cave," Fred said, "about having Flora here when I stay all night. The Childs family felt they would be compromised if people in Laketon knew that Billy-boy's niece flocked by herself in Lakeville. The Childses are personages in Laketon! Aunt Bessie is the treasurer of the antis, and runs a gambling-den on Thursday afternoons—she calls it her Bridge Club. And Billy-boy has a Baconian Club, Saturday nights. My, how useful they are! As my unconventionality would injure

their value to society, I said I would hold Flora's hand. How much use do you suppose Flora would be if thieves broke in to steal?"

"She would be another scream. And you'll like to have her wash the dishes for you."

"Flora is too much in love to wash dishes well," Fred said. "Besides, I don't mind washing 'em, and *I* do it well. The idea that women who *think* can't do things like that is silly. We do housework, or any other work, infinitely better than slaves."

"'Slaves' being your mothers and grandmothers?"

Frederica nodded, prying up a piece of moss and snapping the twig off short.

"Oh, Fred, you are very funny!"

"Glad I amuse you. Pitch me that little stick under your foot."

He handed it to her, and she began to dig industriously into the cracks and crevices of the old gray rock. "The idea of calling Mrs. Holmes a slave is delightful," he said.

"She is a slave to her environment! Do you think she would have dared to do the things I do?"

"She wouldn't have wanted to."

"You evade. Well, I suppose you belong to another generation." Arthur Weston winced. "Don't you think it's queer," she ruminated, "that a man like Howard Maitland is satisfied to fool around with shells?" Whenever she spoke of Howard, a dancing sense of happiness rose like a wave in her breast. "Why doesn't he get into politics, and do something!" she said. Her voice was disapproving, but her eyes smiled.

"Perhaps he likes to keep his hands clean."

"Oh," she said, vehemently, "that's what I hate about men. The good ones, the decent ones, are so afraid of getting a speck of dirt on themselves! That's where women—not Grandmother's kind—are going to save the world. *They* won't mind being smirched to save the race!"

"Frederica," her listener said, calmly, "when that time comes, may God have mercy on the race. Your grandmother (I speak generically) thought she saved the race by keeping clean."

"And letting men be—" she paused to find a sufficiently vehement word. "It's the double standard that has landed us where we are; it has made men vile and kept women weak. We'll go to smash unless we have one standard."

"Which one?" he asked; "yours or ours?"

"You know perfectly well," she said, for once affronted.

"I only asked for information. There's no denying that there are members of your sex who rather incline to our poor way of doing things. Oh, not that we are not a bad lot; only, to be our equals, it isn't necessary to sit in the gutter with us. Continue to be our sup—"

"Let's cut out bromides," she said. "You (I, also, speak generically)—"

"Thanks so much!"

"—have pulled enough of your 'superiors' down to share your gutter. It's time now for men to get out of the gutter and come up to us."

"You breathe such rarefied air," he objected. He really wished that on a day of such limpid loveliness she would

stop undressing life. He liked to be amused, but once in a while Frederica was just a little too amusing, and he was in the faintest degree bored, as one is bored by a delightful and obstreperous child. He gazed dreamily into the spring haze, watched a ripple spread over the lake, and noted a leaning willow dip its flowing fingers into the water.

"Did you see that fish jump?" he asked.

Frederica gave a disgusted grunt. "Men are all alike. You talk common sense to them and they go to sleep!"

"My dear Freddy," he confessed, "you have enunciated a deep truth. The average poor devil of a male creature, toiling and slaving and digging into common sense to make a living, isn't very keen on having it crammed down his throat on his afternoon out. Not that I am that kind of person. I find your 'common sense' very diverting."

A little patch of red burned in her cheeks. "That's what has kept women slaves—'diverting' men! I believe you prefer fools, every one of you."

"We like our own kind," he teased her.

"Oh," she said, with sudden passion, "I am in earnest, and you won't be serious! This is a real thing to me, this emancipation of women. It means—a new world!"

"Yet this world," he began—the world before them, with its blue serenity of a gentle sky, its vitality of bursting buds and warm mists and cool, lapping water; the world of a woman's soul and body—was not this enough for any one? Why struggle for change? Why try to upset the existing order? And Frederica, speaking of such ugly things, was so very upsetting! As she spoke

"DID YOU SEE THAT FISH JUMP?" HE ASKED. FREDERICA GAVE A DISGUSTED GRUNT

she looked at him with the naked innocence which marks the mind of the reformer—that noble and ridiculous mind which, seeing but one thing, loses so completely its sense of proportion. The facts she flung at him he would have hidden from the eyes of girls. Yet he knew that they were facts. . . . He had protested that women should trust the chivalry of men, and she had burst out: "Thank you, I prefer to trust the ballot! 'Chivalry,' and women working twelve hours a day in laundries! 'Chivalry,' and women cleaning spittoons in beer-saloons! 'Chivalry,' and prostitution! No, sir! unless his personal interests are concerned, man's '*chivalry*' is a pretty rotten reed for women to lean on!"

The crude words in which she swept away his comfortable evasions made him cringe, but he could not deny their accuracy, nor avoid the deduction that one of the reasons there continued to be "ugly" things in the world was that until now the eyes of women had been holden that they should not see them. Men had done this. Men had created a code which made it a point of honor and decency to hide the truth from women; to shield them, not from the effect of facts, but from the knowledge of facts!

Frederica's knowledge was dismaying to Arthur Weston, both from tenderness for her and from his own esthetic sensitiveness; it was all so unlovely!

"How do other men take this sort of talk?" he asked; "the Childs boys, for instance?"

"Bobby and Payton? I would as soon talk to Zip as to them! They are like their father; they have chubby

minds. Laura is the only intelligent person in that family. She gave in to Billy-boy about the parade," Fred said, regretfully, "but she did go with me last week when I talked suffrage to the garment-workers. I tell you what—it took sand for Laura to do that! Uncle William was hopping—not at her, of course, but at wicked Freddy; and Bobby and Payton cursed me out for leading Laura into temptation."

"How about Maitland?" he asked. He had taken Frederica's hand and was examining her seal ring. She let her fingers lie in his as lightly as though his hand had been Zip's head, and he found himself wishing that she were less amiable.

"Howard?"—her eyes brimmed suddenly with sunshine; "oh, Howard doesn't belong on the same bench with the chubby Childses! He *thinks*,—and he entirely agrees with me."

"Which proves that he thinks?"

She saw the malice of his question, and rather sharply drew her hand from his.

"When is he coming home?" Weston asked.

"November," she said, shortly, and gave a flake of lichen a vicious jab that tossed it out into the water.

"How's he getting along with his shells?"

"All right, I guess. I don't hear from him very often. He's left the region of mails. I've sent him a good many pamphlets and an abstract of a paper I'm writing for the annual meeting of the league. One of these days he 'll stop puddling round with shells and do something, I hope. I won't let up on him till he does."

"Merely being a fairly decent fellow isn't enough for you?"

"Not *nearly* enough!"

"Oh, Fred, how young you are!" he sighed; then pulled Zip's tail and was snapped at.

Suddenly he looked her straight in the face. "Are you engaged to him?" he demanded, harshly.

"Heavens, no!" she said, laughing.

His hands tightened around his knees; he opened his lips, then closed them hard. "I *almost* made a fool of myself," he told himself, afterward. However, his possibilities for folly were not visible to Frederica, who continued to lay down the law as to the work a man ought to do in the world. "When we get the vote," she said, "we'll show you what a citizen's responsibilities are."

"Thanks so much," he murmured. "You are going to do all the things we do, I suppose?"

"Of course," she said, joyfully; "everything—and a lot you don't do because you are too lazy!"

"I suppose you will leave us the right to propose?"

"I'll share it with you," she said, and they both laughed.

"Oh, my dear Fred," he said, "I must come back to the chestnut: you are our superiors, and we like you to be. I suppose that's because we are born hunters and are keen for the unattainable. We won't bag the game if it roosts on our fists."

"Well," she reassured him, springing to her feet, "*I'm* not going to roost on your fist; don't be afraid!"

"Try me," he said, under his breath. But she did not hear him.

"Come, Zippy, we must go home," she said, and extended a careless hand to Arthur Weston, as if to help him rise. He pretended not to see it.

("The next thing will be a wheeled chair!" he told himself, hotly.)

CHAPTER XIII

ON the first of June Frederica transferred herself and a somewhat reluctant Flora from Payton Street to Lakeville.

"Flora thinks her beau won't go out there to see her," Miss Carter explained.

"Nonsense!" Fred said. "If he wants to see her he'll come, and if he doesn't want to see her she'd better find it out now." But she was not entirely unsympathetic, and told Flora there would be a piano in the cottage so that the music lessons could be continued—which raised the cloud a little.

A day or two later Mrs. Holmes called at No. 15 to bid Mrs. Payton good-by for the summer, and the next week the Childses dropped in, in the evening, for the same purpose. They all made their annual remark: "How *can* you stay in town in the hot weather?" And Mrs. Payton made her annual reply: "I hate summer resorts. I'm much more comfortable in my own house." Nobody asked the real question, "How can you stay here with Morty?" And Mrs. Payton never gave the real explanation: "My life is perfectly empty except for Mortimore; that's why I stay with him."

When they had all left town Mrs. Payton, who changed

her under-flannels and packed up her winter blankets by the calendar, put the stuffed furniture into linen covers, and told Anne to keep the shutters bowed all over the house—except in the ell; the sun was never shut out of the room with the iron bars over the windows. Then summer sleepiness took possession of the household. No one disturbed the quiet except when, occasionally, Arthur Weston, bored and kindly, dropped in to ask for a cup of tea. He told himself once, after a dull hour of drinking very hot tea and listening to plaintive details of Freddy's behavior, that he was going to leave directions in his will to have inscribed upon his tombstone, "*He seen his duty, and he done it.*" It occurred to him that he would not wait for the tombstone to suggest that same duty to Frederica. . . .

As the Payton house fell into somnolence, Payton Street woke up. The air, stagnant between sun-baked brick walls, was a medley of noises that sometimes sank to a rumbling diapason, or sometimes stabbed the ear in single discords: the jangle of mule-bells, the bumping of the car on the switch, the jolt of milk-wagons over the cobble-stones. In the provision-store all day long a parrot vociferated; from the livery-stable came the monotonous pounding of hoofs, or, when Mr. Baker sent out a hearse and some funeral hacks, the screech of grating wheels. Hand-organs came and went. Fruit-dealers cried their wares—"Strawberries! Strawberries! Strawb—" The ailanthus-shaded pavements swarmed with shrill-voiced children; they summoned one another to pull the parrot's tail or to look at the hearse; they assailed the ice-carts,

reveling in the drip from the tail-boards and sucking what bits of ice they could scrape up. Sometimes they squabbled raucously, sometimes wept; sometimes, hushing their betraying giggles, crept into Mrs. Payton's front yard and climbed up on the iron dog "to play circus"—until Mrs. Payton, always on the watch, discovered them and sent Miss Carter down to drive them away.

Except for skirmishes with the marauding children, Mrs. Payton's days were very placid. She worked out new puzzles and dozed through stories in the magazines. She wrote twice a week dutiful letters to her mother, pausing occasionally to think of something to say or to listen, absently, to the swish of the watering-cart along the street; she liked the wet smell of the watered cobblestones mingling with the heavy odor of the blossoming ailanthus. There never seemed to be anything to tell Mrs. Holmes, except that she had been dreadfully busy, and that the "accommodating" waitress didn't keep her sink clean, and that the barber's children were very trying. Every fine afternoon, sitting opposite Miss Carter and Morty, she drove out to the park and home again. Once she summoned up all her energy and went to Lakeville to spend a day with Fred. She thought that if she didn't go, Freddy would believe she preferred to stay with Morty. ("Oh, if I *only* hadn't told her I loved him best!" she used to reproach herself.) It was a bitter thing to Mrs. Payton to pass through Laketon and see the place where a Payton girl ought to be, "instead of living with all kinds of people in Lakeville!" When Fred met her at the station and brought her to the ugly little cottage—its garish interior

vivid, now, with yellow pennons—she tried, for the sake of peace, to restrain her disapproval of everything she saw, but she couldn't help saying she wondered how Fred could stand the solferino lamp-shade.

"Hideous," Frederica said, carelessly, "so why look at it? I never look at our Iron Virgin."

"There is some difference in value," Mrs. Payton reproved her.

"No, only in cost," her daughter said; then saw the color mount into her mother's face, and gritted her teeth. ("I needn't have said that—but it's true! Darn it, I *am* like him!") After that she tried to think of something pleasant to say, but what was there to talk about?—only the waitress, and the heat, and the barber's dirty children. Indeed, it would have been difficult to decide which found that visit to the bungalow the most trying, the mother or the daughter. Certainly it was a relief to both of them when it was over.

"Mother came out to the camp and I wasn't a bit nice to her," Fred bemoaned herself, one day, to Arthur Weston, when he met her entering No. 15 just as he was leaving it. He turned back and followed her into the parlor.

"And nobody can be so un-nice as you, when you put your mind on it," he said, genially.

She laughed. "You never talk through your hat to me; you're straight. That's why I like you."

"Then you'll like me more, for I'm going to be very straight," he warned her. He looked about for any kind of a cool seat, but subsided into a linen-covered feather-bed of a chair, close to the bust of Mr. Andrew Payton;

his eye-glasses on their black ribbon dangling in a thread of sunshine, sent faint lights back and forth on the ceiling. "Life is very dull for your mother," he said, fanning himself with his hat; "why don't you come in oftener?"

Frederica, on the piano-stool, struck a careless octave. "Life dull? Why, I think it's wildly exciting! As for coming in, I'm too busy."

"Reforming the world? You might begin the reformation by making things happier here. Happiness is a valuable reformatory agent. You could cheer Mrs. Payton up, but you prefer 'being busy.'"

Fred colored. He had spoken to her once before in this same peremptory way, and she had been angry; now she was embarrassed. "I'm on my job. I've started a suffrage league—"

"There are other people who can start leagues. There is only one person who can make your mother happy."

"Mr. Weston, the relative value of picture puzzles and the emancipation of women—"

That made him really indignant; he stopped fanning himself and looked at her with hard eyes. "The doing of the immediate duty by each individual woman will emancipate the sex a good deal quicker than talking! You needn't stop your suffrage work to do your duty as a daughter. Did you ever hear anything about bearing one another's burdens?"

"Sounds like the Bible," Fred said.

"It is. I commend the book as a course in sociology."

"But," she defended herself, "I *do* come home quite

often. I'm going to be here to-night. I'm going to a dinner dance at the Country Club, and I'm coming back here to stay all night."

"Yes, you will come for your own convenience, not your mother's pleasure. See here, Fred! You once asked me if you were like your father,"—involuntarily she raised her hand, as if to fend off a blow—"I had great respect for Mr. Payton in many ways, but he had the selfishness of power. *So have you.* Whew!" he ended, rising, "I believe it's a hundred in the shade!"

Fred was silent.

"I am coming out to Lakeville in a day or two. Got my new car yesterday, and I am burning to display it."

Still she was silent. A watering-cart lumbered by and some children squealed in a sudden cold splash.

"Until now," he said, "I have believed that you were a good sport."

"And now you think I'm not?"

"You don't seem to know what the word Duty means; —which is another way of saying that you don't play the game."

"If the game is to make things pleasant for Mortimore, and put picture puzzles together, I don't care to play it," she said, cockily. She followed him to the front door and stood there as he went down the steps. But when he reached the gate she darted after him and clapped a frank hand on his shoulder. "*You're* a dead game sport! I don't know any other man who'd have biffed me right in the face like that."

"I skinned my own knuckles," he admitted, with a

droll gesture of rubbing a bruised hand. "Still, I don't mind, if it does you good."

"Cheer up! Maybe it will," she said, and, laughing, threw a kiss to him and vanished into the house. He laughed, to —then frowned. "She wouldn't have kissed her hand to Maitland. I don't count," he thought. As he walked off, hugging the shady side of the street, he added, "I *am* a fool!"

Frederica had not the slightest intention of becoming immediately domestic, but as she went up-stairs to dress she happened to glance down the little corridor in the ell, and there, outside Morty's door, was poor, faithful Miss Carter. Her one night off a week, when Mrs. Baker, from the livery-stable, took her place, did not suffice to lessen very much the burden of Morty's perpetual society, and that and the heat had obviously worn upon her.

"Miss Carter, why don't you go to the theater?" Frederica called to her, impulsively. "I'll stay with Morty tonight. I suppose we can't get Mrs. Baker on such short notice?"

"No, she can't come except on her regular night; and you are going to a dance, Miss Freddy," the tired woman objected, rather faintly.

"Nonsense! I don't care about dancing. Go ahead. Get a ticket for 'Heels and Toes.' It's corking."

Her mother followed her into her room to thank her. "That's very sweet of you, Freddy. Not that Morty needs anybody when he once gets to sleep; so far as that goes, I don't need to go to the expense of having Mrs.

Baker here on Miss Carter's evenings out; but I like to feel there's some one near, you know."

"It's less lonely for you," Fred said, with unwonted insight.

"Yes," Mrs. Payton agreed, wistfully. "She's somebody to talk to. You needn't sit in Morty's room; outside the door will do. And I'll sit with you."

"I want to read, so I'll sit inside by the light."

"Well, don't be nervous. He won't stir."

"I'm not in the least nervous," Fred said; "I'm only—disgusted."

Mrs. Payton's chin quivered. "You ought not to speak so about your brother. Remember, even if he isn't—bright, he's a *man*, and the head of the family." Fred looked at her with genuine curiosity; how could she say a thing like that! "Besides," Mrs. Payton added, "Doctor Davis always said his intellect was there; it isn't his fault that it is veiled."

"No, it isn't *his* fault," Frederica said, significantly. She took her book into the bare room, which could not be carpeted or curtained because of the poor, destroying hands that sometimes had to be tied for fear they would claw and snatch, even at Miss Carter's heavy chair or at the table, screwed down to the floor. There was a droplight over the table, and Frederica turned it on and opened her book; but she did not read much; the snoring breath from the bed disturbed her. Instead, she fell to thinking about Howard Maitland—sometimes she was impatient with herself for thinking of him so constantly! But the warm satisfaction that took possession of her

whenever he came into her mind, was an irresistible temptation. She did not often speculate upon his feeling for her. "He's fond of me," she told herself, once in a while, contentedly. That some time he would tell her he was fond of her was a matter of course. Just now, she fell to calculating how soon her last letter would reach him. One from him, acknowledging the receipt of some suffrage literature, had come that morning. "I don't believe one woman in fifty has your brains," he had written. Fred smiled; when he came home in November she would show him those "brains"! Apparently, Mr. Arthur Weston did not take much stock in them—"He prefers the domestic virtues," she thought, with a flash of amusement. "I wonder if I'm domestic enough to suit him, to-night? I suppose he would think it was better to sit with an idiot than to try to move the world along!" But the next minute she was contrite. "He can't help being old. I suppose this is the sort of thing his generation calls 'Duty'!"

She might have reflected further upon the foolishness of the past generation, if just then Mrs. Payton had not come stealthily along the hall. She stood in the doorway, raising a cautioning finger.

"Oh, you can't wake him," Frederica said, in her natural voice. But Mrs. Payton spoke in a whisper.

"Freddy, isn't your cottage damp—so near the lake? There's no surer way to take cold than—"

"Not a bit damp!"

"Does Flora make good coffee for you?"

"Bully."

"I hope she's more contented. Miss Carter says the whole trouble with Flora is she wants to get married, but she makes herself so cheap the men won't look at her."

Fred frowned. That word "cheap" always irritated her.

"Miss Carter is a good woman," Mrs. Payton went on, "but she's a little coarse once in a while."

"I suppose Flora wants a home of her own," Fred said, yawning; "when women have no brains they have to marry for homes."

"All women want homes, whether they have brains or not," said Mrs. Payton; "where would they have their babies if they didn't have homes? Freddy, it must be very lonely for you in Lakeville. Your Uncle William is really shocked about it. He says there are no people of our class there."

"Billy-boy is correct. I had two people of the better class in to supper last night—*workers*. Mother, one of the things the women's vote is going to do, besides giving the Floras of the world a chance to be independent of men, is to obliterate class lines."

"Then it will have to obliterate life," Mrs. Payton whispered. "Women need men to take care of them. And as for class, God makes a difference in people. You can't vote God down."

It was so unusual for Mrs. Payton to set her opinion against her daughter's that Frederica laughed, in spite of herself. Mrs. Payton laughed a little, too; then they both looked at the bed, but the heavy breathing went steadily on.

"Your grandmother thinks," Mrs. Payton said, impulsively, "that you would have more beaux if we lived up on the Hill."

"That's like her."

"Freddy dear, you know I have to stay here on account of Morty? Not that I'd do more for him than for you—I love you both *just* the same! But I couldn't take him up on the Hill."

"'Course you couldn't! Mother, for the Lord's sake, don't listen to Grandmother! She's one of the type that keeps the world back."

"She doesn't like change, that's all," Mrs. Payton explained. She came in and sat down at the table.

"Yes; she doesn't like change," Fred agreed. "If Nature had listened to Grandmother we'd all be protoplasm still. Probably the grandmother of the first worm that sprouted legs, kicked. No, she couldn't kick," Fred said, chuckling, "because she didn't have the legs she despised; she just said, 'It isn't *done!*' "

Mrs. Payton looked perfectly blank.

"I'm going to use that idea in my paper," Fred said, with satisfaction.

"Do you think Howard Maitland likes you to write papers, dear?"

"Likes me to? Why shouldn't he? It wouldn't make a bit of difference to me whether he did or not, but as he has ordinary garden sense, I am sure he doesn't dislike it."

"Men," Mrs. Payton said, timidly, "don't like clever women."

"Clever men do."

"Your dear father was clever—but he married me."

The simplicity of that was touching, even to Frederica.

"You were a thousand times too good for him!"

Mrs. Payton was pleased, but she made the proper protest: "Oh, my *dear!* I had a letter from your grandmother yesterday; she thinks it's shocking—your living in Lakeville alone."

"Go on!" Frederica said, contemptuously.

"Hush-sh!" Mrs. Payton cautioned her.

Fred shrugged her shoulders. "You can't wake—*That.* Talk about being shocked,—I suppose it never occurred to Uncle William or Grandmother that their ideas of what is and isn't shocking, produced That?"

Mrs. Payton shrunk away as if her daughter had struck her; she murmured, chokingly, some wounded remonstrance, then tiptoed through the shadowy hall into the sitting-room. At the table, spread with an unfinished game of Canfield, she sat down, drearily. This was what always happened; they simply could not get along together! Whenever she held out empty hands, begging for love, they were slapped. She began to shuffle the cards, wondering painfully if it was because Freddy was still brooding over that thing she said about loving Mortimore best. "I'm afraid she's jealous," Mrs. Payton sighed.

Frederica, alone, reflected upon her mother's assertion that men disliked clever women. It annoyed her, not because there was any truth in it, but because it reminded her of Woman's cowardly acquiescence in Man's estimate of her intelligence. Of course it was all right about

Howard; Howard had sense! But men generally—did they really dislike clever women? If so, it merely meant that they were afraid of Truth. They wanted women to be timid, and pretty, and useless: to be slaves and play-things!—so they fooled them into the belief that silliness was attractive, and that slavery and virtue were the same thing. It was men who had taught women to believe that awful thing her mother had said about Morty's being "the head of the family"; had taught them to believe that a man —not because he was good, or wise, or strong, but because he was a *man*—was the one to rule!

"No wonder we are slaves; we've swallowed that lie since Adam. Well, there'll be none of it in mine!" she said. What was going to be in "hers"? Business, to begin with. She was going to make a success of her business. Her books had shown a better month—they should show a still better month, if she wore her shoes out walking about town to please clients! Yes, Success! It was not a personal ambition: there was no self-seeking in Fred Payton; she wanted to succeed because her success would show what women could do; show that a woman was as able as a man—as wise, as good ("better! better!" she told herself); show that a woman could rule, could achieve, could be "the head of the family"! The thing that was to be "in hers" was work to free women from the shackles of the old ideals, from content in sex slavery, with all its ignorances and futilities, its slackness of purpose and shameful timidities, that a man-made world had called "duties." And Howard, who was not "afraid of clever women," would help her! A passion of consecration to

the woman's cause rose in her heart like a wave. For the next hour she walked up and down the dimly lighted room, planning what she was going to do for women.

It was nearly twelve when Miss Carter's ponderous step told her she was free. She laughed good-naturedly at the thanks the refreshed woman was eager to give, but just as she was leaving the room Miss Carter's last word caught her ear:

"I've had such a pleasant time, Miss Freddy. I'll do my work better for it."

'Do her work better.' . . . In her eagerness to do her own work Fred had never thought very much of other people's; but what a different world it would be if everybody did their work better! "If every woman did her best on her job, even if it were only taking care of Mortimores, it would help things along," she told herself. "It's slackness on the job that holds the world back." Looked at from that angle, then—the bettering of Miss Carter's work—perhaps it did count to make things pleasant at Payton Street? The idea put a new light on Mr. Weston's call-down. Bearing other people's burdens had seemed not in the least worth while; but if cheering people up helped them to do their work—work which, after all, had to be done, somehow!—why, then there was sense in it. She saw no sense in "cheering" her mother, for her mother did nothing at all. Frederica had no dutiful illusions; Mrs. Payton was an absolutely useless human being—and her daughter was perfectly aware of it. "*She* has no burden to bear," Fred thought, carelessly. "But to give old fat Carter a hand by just amusing her,—that

helps the doing of work; and *that* counts! I'll come in oftener," she decided.

So, in her own fashion, by a back door, so to speak, Frederica Payton entered into the old idea of *Duty*.

CHAPTER XIV

FRED was eager to impart to her man of business her wonderful discovery that visits to Payton Street should be made, not because of "duty," but because they were of value to the world.

"Your premises were wrong, but your deductions were correct," she instructed him, and he roared with laughter.

"Fred, you'll discover the Ten Commandments next. It's the same old result, only you call it by a different name. But go ahead; run the universe! I don't care what kind of oil you use, so long as the gears don't stick."

Mr. Weston's metaphors confessed the fact that he had achieved a motor so that he might go thirty miles for a cup of tea. He used to come out to the camp two or three times a week, and, shading his eyes from the magenta lamp-shade, and the frieze of Japanese fans, and the yellow "Votes for Women" flags, listen dreamily to Fred's theories for the running of the universe, and also to that paper on which she was so hard at work. She wanted his criticism, she said, but, of course, what she really wanted was his praise. She got it—meagerly, and with so many qualifications that, when all was said, it hardly seemed like praise at all. That he was doing his best to make her carry her little torch so that it might shed its glimmer of

light, yet not set things on fire, never occurred to her. If it had, she would have resented it hotly. As it was, his temperance never checked her vehemence, but neither did it irritate her. Her arrogant and shallow certainties, on the contrary, did occasionally irritate him, and, of course, they never brought him any conviction; but they did oblige him to be intellectually candid with himself, and his candor brought him to the point of telling her that he thought her generation better than his, because it was not afraid of Truth. "So, perhaps you women may save civilization," he said.

"Hooray!" said Fred.

"Hold on," he told her, dryly; "cheers are premature. What I mean is that feminism, with its hideously bad taste and its demand for Truth, is *here*, whether we like it or not! It *may* make the world over, or it may send us all on the rocks."

"Nonsense!"

"The hope in it is your brand-new sense of social responsibility. The menace is your conceited individualism."

"Of course you are not conceited yourself," she said, sweetly.

"I wish you wouldn't interrupt me! I concede that your sense of responsibility needs the tool of the ballot, just as a farmer needs a spade when he wants to raise a crop of potatoes. That is why I am compelled to call myself a suffragist."

"Hooray!" she said again.

He looked at her drolly. "It's queer about you—not

you, but your sex; you are mentally, but not emotionally, interesting. You are not nearly as charming as the ladies of my youth; you have no sense of proportion, and you jolt the life out of a man, by trying to jump the track the minute you get tired of the scenery. Also you are occasionally boring. But you can't help that; you are reformers."

"Are reformers bores?" she said.

"*Always!*" he declared.

"Why?"

"Because," he said, dryly, "they never suffer from any impediment in their speech."

Yet he was not so much bored that he stayed away from Lakeville. The place itself seemed to him entirely funny. Its very respectable population was made up of hard-working, good-naturedly vulgar folk, whose taste was painful or amusing, as you might happen to look at it. Once Fred made him stay to supper, and afterward go to a party with her and Laura—whose presence had been secured by judicious pressure upon Billy-boy. This especial festivity was called a "can-can" because the guests' idea of humor consisted in wearing a string of empty tin cans over their shoulders, with a resultant noise when they danced which gave, it seemed, a peculiar joy. Frederica's man of business, sitting on a bench with several gentlemen who mopped themselves breathlessly after their exertions and were obviously comfortable in their shirt-sleeves, laughed until, he said, his sides ached.

"You *like* it, Fred?" he asked, incredulously—she and Laura had taken him home with them to give him some-

thing cool to drink before he started on his midnight spin into town.

"Love it!" she said.

"Well," he said, "it seems to be a case of 'give me heaven for climate, but hell for company!' It would bore me to death."

They were on the little front porch of Sunrise Cottage—Laura lounging on the lowest step, looking up at the stars, and Arthur Weston sitting on the railing, sipping ginger-ale. Frederica, standing up, began to expatiate on the woman's club she had organized. After the first meeting she had turned it into a suffrage league, under the admiring eyes of ladies who whispered to each other that she was *the* Miss Payton—"*you* know? Society girl. Why, my husband says the Paytons could buy up every house in Lakeville and not know they'd put their hands in their pockets!" Fred had constant afternoon teas for these ladies—which would have been pleasanter if Flora, when waiting upon them, had been less haughty.

"She calls all our neighbors 'common people,'" Fred said.

Laura laughed: "Wait till we get the vote and we'll have equality, won't we, Fred?"

"You bet we will!"

"You won't," Weston assured them, "because there ain't no such thing. My dear infants, the Lord made us different, and no vote can change His arrangements."

"That's what Mother said; I was quite astonished to have Mother pull off an opinion on me," Fred said.

"Your mother has a great many opinions, and mighty sensible ones, too."

She gave him a surprised look, like a child catching an older person in a foolish statement. "Oh, well," she said, "of course, it's hard for people of your generation to keep up with the procession."

If he flinched, nobody saw it. "You being the 'procession,' I suppose?" he said, raising an amiable eyebrow—but he did not feel amiable. Then he looked at his watch and said he must start.

"Oh, don't go!" Fred entreated.

"You two girls ought to be in bed," he said. They went with him and watched him crank his machine; as he threw in the clutch, he called back, a little anxiously, "Make her loaf, Laura! She's tired."

Indoors, while they were locking up, Laura giggled. "He's daft about you, Freddy!"

"Mr. Weston? My dear, you're mad! He looks on me as a granddaughter."

"Those aunts or cousins, or whatever they are, of his," Laura said, sleepily, "are at the hotel, and I went with Mother to call on them. The old one, who looks like an eagle, is perfectly sweet; but the pouter-pigeon one said that she did not think the young woman of to-day, who went into business, 'was calculated to make any man happy.' 'Course, I knew she was afraid you would catch 'dear Arthur'! But really—"

"Come on," Fred interrupted, starting up-stairs.

Laura stumbled along behind her. "Really, I think he is gone on you."

"Goose!" The idea was too absurd to discuss; instead, when she was combing her hair Fred called through

the partition that separated the tiny bedrooms and said she wanted to tell Laura something.

"Come in!" Laura called back; and Frederica, comb in hand, came in, and sat on the edge of the bed. At first she talked about Flora, who didn't like to come out to the camp, because it took her away from her beau. "The McKnight chauffeur is very attentive," Fred said; "fortunately for me, Jack's going off with the car for all of August, or I'm afraid she'd leave me, so as to get back to town. Isn't it funny how crazy women in the lower classes are to get married?"

Laura nodded, sleepily.

"Want me to read you Howard's last letter?" Fred said, and took it out of the pocket of her kimono.

Laura, curled up on the bed, listened. "He's right," she said, when Frederica, with due carelessness, read Howard's panegyrics on her brains; "you are terribly clever, Freddy."

"Go off!" Fred said. "Laura, he's awfully down on Jack McKnight. You wouldn't look at him, would you?"

"At Jack? The idea! If there wasn't another man in the world, I wouldn't look at Jack."

"I want you to do something," Fred said.

"All right. What?"

"It will take nerve."

Laura opened her eyes quickly. "If it's another parade—"

"No! No! Nothing like that. Parades are only to show the strength of the attacking army. I want you to *attack!*"

Laura sighed. "But Father and Mother are so opposed—"

"This is something personal I want you to do."

Laura was obviously relieved.

"It's about Jack McKnight. When he proposes to you—"

"He won't."

"Don't be silly! He will if you let him. And I want you to let him. Then, when you turn him down, tell him *why*."

"Why? He'll know why! Because I'm not in love with him."

"I want you to tell him the reason you're not in love with him."

Laura, flushing to her temples, sat up in bed. "It's none of his business! Or,—or anybody's!"

"It *is* his business—to know that a decent woman won't look at a fast man!"

"Oh," Laura said, tumbling back on her pillow, "I didn't know you meant that. I thought you meant . . . something else."

"That's what I'm up to," Frederica said. "I'm going to get all the girls I know to promise, not only that they won't play with dissipated fellows, but that they'll tell 'em straight out why they won't!"

Laura was silent.

"Truth!" Fred said, flinging up her head, her hair falling back over her shoulders, and her eyes bold and innocent. "Truth is what we want! If we can get this bill through the Legislature—'no marriage without a clean

bill of health'—we'll accomplish a lot for the sake of Truth. I wish you'd signed the petition, Laura. You believe in it?"

"Of course I believe in it. But imagine trying to make Mama understand it!—and Father would have had a fit."

"That's the trouble with women!" Fred said, passionately. "We've been too much afraid of men having fits. Let 'em have fits! It will be good for them. We've let them demand that we should be straight, and we've never had the sand to demand that they should be straight, too. But we're going to do it now. We are going to demand *Truth!* Oh," she said, tears suddenly standing in her eyes, "just plain truth, between men and women, nothing more than that,—would make the world over!"

Laura sighed and shook her head. "As for playing only with the straight ones, I don't see how we can know? It doesn't seem fair not to dance with a man just because some other girl tells you she's heard something—you'd always hear it from a girl."

"General reputation," Fred began; but still Laura hesitated.

"Well, then, when we *do* know it of ourselves, let's hold together and turn 'em down. Everybody knows Jack drinks. I've seen him when he was pretty well loaded," Fred said, her lip drooping with disgust. "He's crazy about you, Laura; give him a leg up by telling him why you wouldn't look at him!"

"Oh, Freddy, really—"

"This is what I'm going to work for," Frederica said, "to teach women to teach men! It's our job, because women are more intelligent than men."

"I don't think Mother is more intelligent than Father," Laura demurred.

Fred swallowed her opinion of the collective Childses' intelligence; "I've thought it all out," she said; "I'm going to give my life up to urging women to set the pace! And we've both of us got to marry men who will join our crusade."

"They won't," Laura prophesied; then added, with sudden, frowning decision: "anyhow, so far as I'm concerned, it doesn't matter. I'm not going to marry anybody."

Fred gave her a quick look. "Why?"

"Well, I don't want to."

"Of course, marriage generally hampers a woman," Frederica conceded. "Perhaps because most of us are tied down to the old idea that it's got to be permanent, —which might be a dreadful bore! I suppose that's a hold-over from the time that we were chattels, and men taught us to feel that marriage was permanent—for *us!* They didn't bother much with permanence for themselves! But I admit that marriage—as men have made it, entirely for their own comfort and convenience, with its drudgery of looking after children—is stunting to women. Queer, though, how they don't mind it! Look at the girls we know—Rose Marks and Mary Morton, and the rest of our class who are married—they haven't a thought above their babies and their owners—*they* call 'em husbands'! Did you know Rose has resigned from the

league? She says she hasn't time to attend the meetings; but I know better. It's because that perfectly piffling Marks man (how *could* she marry him?—he has no nose, to speak of, and such a silly chin!) doesn't approve of us. I suppose you think it's better for a woman not to marry if she really wants to accomplish anything?"

"Well, no; not just that. Men marry, and yet they accomplish things," Laura said.

Frederica frowned. The suggestion of a fundamental difference in men and women annoyed her. "Of course, it doesn't follow that a woman stands still when she marries. If she and the man are in absolute sympathy, intellectually, she needn't vegetate. For my part, I expect to marry,—I want children. But I shall go on with my work. I consider my work of more importance than putting babies to sleep!"

"Everybody can't afford to have somebody put their babies to sleep for them," Laura objected.

"Fortunately I can! I shall have a trained nurse. When a child is well, a trained nurse is every bit as good as a mother. And when it is ill, she's better."

"Suppose your husband doesn't think so?"

"Then he won't be my husband! But I sha'n't run any such risk! I shall marry a man who absolutely agrees with me in everything."

"Maybe he'd like you to agree with him."

"I will, after I've pulled him up to my level," Fred said, grinning.

"I suppose Mr. Howard Ferguson Maitland doesn't need any pulling up?" her cousin said, softly.

Fred's face burned red. "My dear, he is not the only pebble on the beach!"

"He gets home in November," Laura said. "Freddy, it's nearly one, and I'm perfectly dead with sleep!"

Frederica laughed and got up; then hesitated. There was a little droop in Laura's face that she didn't like. "Lolly," she said, "you're bothered. Is it—Jack?"

"Darn Jack!" Laura said. "I loathe him."

"Good girl!" Fred said, with a relieved look. "You scared the stuffing out of me for a minute!"

"You needn't be worried," Laura told her, dryly. "Jack has not played with my young affections. Oh, no; I'm cut out for an old maid! I'm not clever like you."

Frederica, in genuine relief from that moment of anxiety, was betrayed into reassuring truth-telling: "Mother says men don't like clever women."

"If Aunt Bessie could hear H. M. talk about you she'd change her mind."

Fred threw an impulsive arm about her and kissed her. "Oh, *Laura!*" she said. Laura laughed, and kissed her back again, and said if she didn't get out she'd fall asleep in her arms.

But when Fred, blushing like any ordinary girl, had left her to those deferred slumbers, Laura Childs lay awake a long time. . . .

Frederica, alone in her tiny room, had a very sober minute. As she thought it over, Laura's "loathing" did not seem quite convincing. "She's got something on her chest," Fred said. Even when they were little girls she had loved her cousin more than any one in the world, and

to have Laura depressed disturbed her sharply. "*Can* it be Jack?" she asked herself. "I wish Payton or Bobby would kick him!" That she should hand the infliction of such chastisement over to a brother showed that Fred could revert to the type she despised. But she was so troubled about Lolly that she almost forgot her satisfaction in being told—what she already knew!—that Howard appreciated her cleverness.

CHAPTER XV

EXCEPT for the Lakeville ladies, so looked down upon by Flora, Fred had very few visitors that summer. Even Laura did not come very often, though Lakeville was only five miles from Laketon. Perhaps she was afraid of being asked questions. In September both girls were invited by a school friend to come to the seashore for two or three weeks, but Laura waited to know that Fred had declined the invitation ("I can't fool with Society. I'm on my job!" said Fred) before she, Laura, accepted it.

There was, however, one formal call which gave Frederica great joy; her grandmother and Miss Eliza Graham came over from the Laurels to see her—and she never behaved more outrageously! She told Mr. Weston afterward that she had had the time of her life joshing Mrs. Holmes. He assured her that she was an imp, but that he would gladly have paid the price of admission if he had only known that the circus was going to take place. He asked his cousin about it afterward, but her description of the scene was not so funny as Fred's. Indeed, it was rather pathetic—poor Freddy, fighting her grandmother, while Miss Eliza stood outside the ring, so to speak, and watched, pityingly.

"For there's nothing one can do for her, Arthur," Miss

Eliza told him; "she's got to get some very hard knocks before she'll give up advising the Creator how to manage His world."

She and Mr. Weston had found a deserted spot on the veranda at the Laurels, and she told him what she thought of Freddy. "It's a sort of violent righteousness that possesses the child," she said. "Where does she come from, Arthur? That mother! That grandmother! She must be a foundling."

"Her father had power. His righteousness was not very violent, but his temper was."

"She must make her mother very unhappy."

"Yeast makes dough uncomfortable, I suppose," he admitted.

"She's an unscrupulous truth-teller," Miss Graham said, and repeated some of the impertinently accurate things that Frederica, sitting in her ugly little living-room, with the Japanese fans on the walls, and yellow "Votes for Women" pennons over the doors, had flung at Mrs. Holmes. "Her grandmother said the 'women of to-day cheapened themselves'; to which she replied that 'the women of yesterday were dear at any price'!"

"She told me she had merely been truthful," Mr. Weston said. "Justifying herself on the ground of Truth is Fred's form of repentance. But the girl *suffers*, Cousin Eliza!"

"She'll have to suffer a good deal before she'll amount to anything," Miss Eliza said, dryly; "I wanted to shake her! Arthur, if you had any missionary spirit, you would marry her."

"But Cousin Mary says she is 'not a young woman who is calculated'—"

They both laughed. "Nonsense! If she gets a master, she'll make him happy. A good-natured boy won't do. The gray mare would be the better horse. Marry her and beat her."

"Maitland will have to do the beating," he said. But he could not evade her.

"Don't be a fool. Take her! I know you want her."

"I do," he confessed. "But the little matter of her not wanting me seems to be an obstacle."

Miss Eliza, her old eagle head silhouetted against the dazzle of the lake, meditated; then she said, "Is she engaged to Mr. Maitland?"

"No, but she's going to be. Besides, dear lady, I am forty-seven and she is twenty-six. Youth calls to Youth! Please don't suggest that she might prefer to be an 'old man's darling.'"

"You're not an old man. But the average young man—if he fell in love with her—would be under her thumb."

"Why do you say 'if'? Maitland has fallen in love with her, head over heels! He can't stop talking about her brains for five minutes at a time!"

Miss Eliza gave him a keen look. "Well, perhaps human nature has changed since my time. Then, a boy didn't fall in love with a girl's brains, though a grown man sometimes did. Cleverness in a girl is like playfulness in a kitten; it amuses a middle-aged man. The next thing he knows, he's in love!"

"Amuses!" Arthur Weston broke in, cynically; "to

'amuse' a middle-aged man doesn't seem a very satisfying occupation for a girl. Don't you think she'd rather have a boy's ridiculously solemn devotion?"

"But don't I tell you?—Love comes next! And I know you are in love, because you are so foolish. Arthur, I'm ashamed of you! Do have some spunk. Get her! Get her! I don't believe she's in love with that boy."

He gave a rather hopeless laugh. "Oh, yes, she is. I haven't the ghost of a chance; besides—" he paused, took off his glasses, and put them on again, with deliberation—"besides, if I had a chance, I'd be a cur to take it. As you know, I had a blow below the belt. A man never quite gets his wind again, after a little affair like mine. It would be great luck for me to have Fred, but what sort of luck would it be for her to spend her life '*amusing*' me?"

"Nonsense! I won't listen to such—" she paused, while three girls, romping along, arm in arm, swept past them, down the veranda. "Pretty things, aren't they?" she said, looking after them with tender old eyes; "how lovely Youth is!—even when it does its best to be ugly as to clothes and manners, like two of those youngsters. They didn't even see us, they were so absorbed in being young, bless their hearts! The outside one who bowed is a Wharton girl. She is a charming child, charming! And doing wonderfully at college. But those others—!"

"Awful," he agreed. "Cousin Eliza, what's the matter with women, nowadays?"

"Perfectly simple. They are drunk!"

"Drunk?"

"With the sudden sense of freedom. My dear boy,

reflect: When you were born—no, you're too young"—he waved a deprecating hand, but he liked the phrase—"when *I* was born—that's seventy-three years ago—women were dependent upon your delightful sex; so, of course, they were cowards and you were bullies. Oh, yes; there were exceptions! There were courageous women, and henpecked men. And, of course, cowardice didn't always know it was cowardly, and bullying was often nothing but kindness. But you can say what you please, women were not free! They had to do what their men wanted —or quarrel with their families, and strike out for themselves! And what was there for them to do to earn their living? Outside of domestic service, nothing but teaching, sewing, and Sairey Gamp nursing! When I was a girl I did not know enough to teach and I hated sewing. So, if I had wanted to do anything my father and mother didn't approve of, I couldn't have kicked up my heels and said, 'I'll support myself!' Besides, I shouldn't have dared. The Fifth Commandment was still in existence when I was young. But now," she ended, "that's all changed. Girls can kick up their heels whenever they feel like it!"

He laughed, and said that Fred Payton had kicked entirely over the traces.

"She's not the only one," Miss Graham said; "those three girls who passed us have done it. That nice Wharton child is going to study law, if you please! Yes, Freedom! It's gone to their heads; it's champagne on empty stomachs. Empty only for the last two generations—before that there were endless occupations to fill our stomachs.

(My metaphors are a little mixed!) When I was a girl, the daughters of a house, even when people were as well off as Father, always had things to do—'Duties,' we called them. But nowadays there's not enough housework to go round; so if girls are rich, they play at work in—in anything, just to kill time! Like your Miss Freddy."

"Fred is making a success of her real-estate business," he said; "I hadn't a particle of faith in it, but she's making it go."

"It doesn't matter whether you have faith or not; the change has come: *she had to have something to do!* That's the secret of the situation, and there's no use kicking against it. You men have just got to accept the fact of the change. All you can do is to fall back on the thing that hasn't changed, and never can change, and never will change. Give girls that and they will get sober!"

He looked puzzled.

"My dear boy, let them be *women,* be wives, be mothers! Then being suffragists, or real-estate agents, or anything else, won't do them the slightest harm. Marry them, Arthur, marry them!"

"All of them?" he protested, in alarm.

She laughed, but held her own. "I always tell Mary that all that nice, bad child, your Freddy Payton, needs, is a husband. Which Mary thinks is very indelicate in me. But it's true. As for suffrage that the women are all cackling about, I don't care a—a—"

"Damn?" he suggested.

"Copper," she reproved him. "I don't care a copper about it! I've always called myself an anti, but I never

really gave it much thought, one way or the other, until I went to an anti-suffrage meeting last year; that made me a suffragist! I declare, the foolishness of some of their arguments against voting went a long ways toward proving that perhaps they really *haven't* the brains to vote! Somebody said—Bessie Childs, I believe it was—that the ballot would take woman out of the Home. I reflected that Bridge took Bessie out of her home, for three or four hours once a week, and voting would take her out for three or four minutes, once a year. But I kept quiet until somebody intimated that the 'hand that rocks the cradle' is not competent, if you please, to deposit a ballot! Then I stood right up in meeting, and said, 'I'm only a poor old maid, but to my way of thinking, if the hand is as incompetent as that, it is far more dangerous to trust a cradle to it than a ballot!' "

"What did they say to that?"

"They said a cradle was every woman's first duty. 'But it would be most improper in me to have a cradle!' I said. I know they thought me coarse."

"So you are a suffragist?"

"Indeed I'm not! I went to a suffrage meeting, and really, Arthur, I was ashamed of my sex; such violence! such conceit! such shallowness! such impropriety! One of them said that any married woman whose husband did not believe in suffrage should leave him or else have branded on her forehead a word—I cannot repeat to you the word she used. And another of them said that all the antis were 'idiotic droolers.' I thought of my dear sister, and I just couldn't stand that! I said, 'Well, ladies, if

the women who don't want the vote are idiots, is it wise to thrust it upon them? Will idiots make good voters?' "

"You had 'em there."

"No; they just said 'the vote would educate women.' And as for women not wanting it—'why, we'll cram it down their throats,' one of them said. Nice idea of democracy, wasn't it? She explained that some slaves hadn't wanted freedom, but that was no reason for not abolishing slavery! And, of course, she was right. The suffragists have brains, you know, Arthur. Well, as a result of a dose of each party, I'm nothing at all—very much."

"You're agin' 'em both?" he suggested.

"Oh, I still call myself an anti, because the antis are, at least, harmless; but I really don't care much, one way or the other. No; the thing that troubles me isn't suffrage or non-suffrage; it's the fact that somehow women seem to be fighting Nature. *That* worries me. I know that Nature can be depended upon to spank them into common sense when she gets hold of them, but, unfortunately, men won't help Nature out. They don't like girls like Miss Payton—I mean, the young men don't. They don't like girls who are cleverer than they are; but no girl is cleverer than you! Do 'come out of the West, Lochinvar, come out of the West'!"

He laughed and shook his head. "My dear cousin, I am dead in love with you, so don't try to turn my affections in another direction. Besides, Howard Maitland is coming home the end of November."

CHAPTER XVI

BUT it was the middle of October that saw Howard Maitland back again in town. In spite of Frederica's friendly assurance that Jack McKnight hadn't a ghost of a chance, that "queue" lining up at Mr. William Childs's front door-steps bothered him. So, with many large cases of specimens, and a mahogany tan on his lean face, he arrived, one morning, on the Western express. He hardly waited to remove the evidences of several nights in the sleeping-car, before reconnoitering the Childs house. The queue was not visible, but neither was Laura. She was in Philadelphia, a maid told him, and would not be back for another week. He went off rather crest-fallen.

"I'll go and see Freddy," he consoled himself.

As he shot up in an elevator in the Sturtevant Building, whom should he run across but old Weston! "I'm on my way to the real-estate office," he said, grinning like the cub he was, at Fred's plaything.

Mr. Weston did not grin. "I believe she's in her office. Thought you weren't to get home until next month?"

"Wasn't. But—well, I got kind of stale on shells, and I thought I'd like some smoke and soot for a change. So I came home. Oh—you get off here?"

"Yes," Mr. Weston said, briefly, and stepped out into the echoing corridor. In his private office he sat down, and, with his hands in his pockets, his legs stretched out in front of him, regarded his boots.

"Well, he's back," he said to himself.

After a long time he got up, put on his hat, and, heedless of the questioning young lady at the typewriter, slammed his office door behind him. "I'm hard hit," he told himself, roughly, as he stepped into the descending elevator. "It appears that I am capable of feeling something more than '*amusement.*' I'll go and buy the wedding-present. The application of a check that I can't afford may be curative."

The cure would have seemed still more necessary if he could have seen how Howard was welcomed in the real-estate office. Frederica's astonished pleasure was as frank as a man's.

"Good work!" she said, and struck her hand into his. "But I didn't expect you for a month!"

"I couldn't stand it any longer," he told her, joyously. "How's business? How's Laura?"

"Well, clients are not exactly blocking the corridors," she said; "but I'm bursting with pride; I came out ahead last month!"

"Gee!" he said, admiringly. "Well, tell us the news!"

"I've finished my paper," she said. She pushed an open map aside so that she could sit on the edge of her big office table, and looked at him delightedly. "I'm crazy to read it to you. Sit down and light up!" She struck a match on the sole of her shoe, and handed it to him.

"I'm crazy to hear it! Laura's skiddooed. I went to Billy-boy's"—he blew the match out and dropped it on the floor;—"and got thrown down on the front steps."

"Yes, she's playing around with the Mortons. I was asked, but—there are so many more interesting things here! Howard, they are talking about abolishing the red-light district, and we're going to get that bill I wrote you about, through the Legislature, if we *bust!*"

"What bill?"

"Registration. Health certificate—or no marriage license! You've got to roll up your sleeves and get busy."

"All right," he agreed, promptly. "She's not engaged, is she?"

"Who? Laura? Heavens, no! She has something else to think of than your sex. Look here: why don't you come out to my bungalow and we'll talk things out?" She explained that though she had moved back to Payton Street she still used the camp when she had what she called a "night out." "I take Flora along for propriety. Isn't that rich? I tell you what, I've been a boon to the whole connection. I've given 'em something to talk about!"

"What's the matter with going out in my car this afternoon?" he asked. But she put him off until the next day. She was thinking that she must brace the house up and arrange for a rattling good supper! "We'll have a big fire," she thought, cozily, "and we'll sit up and talk till all's blue. . . . You'll stay all night?" she said. "I've a very decent little guest-room."

For once she startled him, but her frank gaze made him almost ashamed of his instinctive sense of fitness.

He said no, he wouldn't stay all night; he had to be on hand very early the next morning to look after a consignment of freight. "But I'll turn up at Payton Street in the car to-morrow afternoon, about four. Is that right?"

"Just right," she said. She had decided quickly that she would send Flora out Friday morning with provisions. "I bet he'll take notice when I feed him!" she thought. "What kind of a salad shall I have? Not one of those footling 'ladies' luncheon' things, all nuts and apples and stuffed truck. Men want just lettuce or tomatoes. No fancy doings!"

She was anxious to get rid of him and go home and make her plans. It occurred to her to ask her mother what kind of cheese a man would like. But no, that would involve her in a lot of talk about "propriety." She nodded to him over her shoulder as he left the office, and the next minute she heard the elevator door clang behind him. Then, with a furtive glance about the room, as if to make sure she was alone, she stooped and picked up that half-burnt match which had lighted his cigarette. . . . For a minute she held it in her hand, then laughed, shamefacedly, and put it in her pocket-book. Her face was vivid with happiness. She pulled down the top of her desk, then flung it up again, and scrawled on one of her business cards: "Closed until Monday morning." "I'll stick that in the door," she said; "I sha'n't be able to spare a minute for the office to-morrow." But, despite her haste, she stood for a dreamy moment smiling into space. Then she sat down in her revolving chair and sunk her chin on her fist.

He couldn't stand it any longer!

The words sang themselves in her heart. "Goose! Why did he 'stand it' as long as he did? Well, he didn't lose any time getting to the Sturtevant Building!" She felt quite confident that he wouldn't "stand it" longer than the next night, then, alone before the fire in her little house, he would—*ask her*. The thought was like wine! But instantly another thought made her quiver. Why should he "ask," when she was so ready to give? She wished that instead of "asking" her he would take things for granted. She wished he would just say: "When shall we be married, Fred?" And she would say, just as nonchalantly, "Oh, any old time!" And he would say, "Tomorrow?" And she would say, "Oh, well, the family wouldn't like it if we didn't let 'em celebrate getting me off their hands!" She thought of Laura's anxiety about the bridesmaids' dresses, and smiled. "I hate that kind of fuss as much as men do, but it would be a shame to disappoint Lolly." So she would say, "Call it a month from now." Then he would urge—that brought the other thought again. Why should he urge?—when all she wanted was to give! Oh, how much she wanted to *give!* Her heart seemed to rise in her throat, and she said, aloud, "Why not? Why not?" A pang of happiness brought the tears to her eyes. It was not only love that stirred her—the simple, human instinct—it was the realization that love was seconded by an intellectual conviction, and that she could show by her own act that women and men are equals, not only in all the things for which she had been fighting (they seemed so little now!)—opinions, rights, privileges; but equals also in this supreme business of

loving. Yes, there was no reason why she should not be the one to ask. No reason why she should not be the beggar! The generosity of it made her glad from head to foot. She stood up, her lips parted, her breath catching in her throat; she would give, before he could ask! It was a sacramental instant; for with the purpose of giving—"herself, her soul and body"—was that exalted realization that an opinion of the mind can be merged with an impulse of the body. She was profoundly shaken and solemn. Suddenly she put her hands over her face, and stood motionless: there were no words, but the gesture was a prayer. When a little later she left her office her face was white. She was happier than she had ever been in her life.

She walked home, stopping, on a sudden impulse, to buy a bunch of violets for her mother. At her own front door she met the postman, who gave her a card from Laura: "*I'm going on to Boston—to stay with the Browns. Home next week.*" Under the little scrawling signature, "L. C.," was another line: "*Why not write H. M. and tell him to bring home some Filipino gauze for the bridesmaids' dresses?*"

Frederica bit a joyous lip. "Imp! Well," she thought, with a queer little matronly air of amusement, "she'll get her dress sooner than she expects." Then she thrust her key into the lock and let herself into the hall; the light in the red globe flickered in the draught of fresh air, and Andy Payton's hat moved slightly. The shut-up stillness of the house was full of a sickly fragrance: "Bay rum!" Fred said, resignedly. "She has a headache, I suppose."

She ran up-stairs, the violets in her hand. "Finished

your puzzle?" she called out at the sitting-room door. But the puzzle was still chaotic; Mrs. Payton was standing before a mirror, tying a handkerchief around her head.

"Too bad you have a headache!" Frederica said. "Mother, I shall want Flora to-morrow. I'm going to the camp for the night. Here are some violets for you."

Mrs. Payton put out a languid hand and said, "Thank you, dear."

Then she sank into a pillowy chair and tried to dab some more bay rum on her temples, but it ran down her face on to her dress, and had to be wiped off, feebly.

"I hope it won't stain my waist," she bemoaned herself. "The violets are very nice, dear. I always used to say when I was a young lady—'Give me violets!' As for Flora, she is simply impossible! She's been crying all day."

"What on earth is the matter with her?"

"I'm sure I don't know. Some nonsense about not wanting to live. Rather different from the way servants talked when I went to housekeeping. She said—" Mrs. Payton paused, and with closed eyes cautiously tipped the bottle of bay rum on the bandage across her forehead, then hurriedly sopped her cheeks as it trickled down from under the handkerchief. "Oh, dear, it *will* stain my dress! She said she had 'nothing to do.' I said, 'Nothing to do? *I* can find you enough to do.' She said she was tired of housework. I told her that was very wicked. I said, '*I'm* busy from morning till night, and what would you think of me if I said I was tired of doing my duty?' Miss Carter says she is simply dead in love with one of the hack-drivers,

who won't have anything to do with her. I can't think so; Flora has always seemed so refined. I don't believe she'd cheapen herself that way. I wish she was more religious. Religion is so good for servants. It makes them contented, and gives them an interest. Not but what Flora is a good girl, only I should be so much more comfortable if she was contented. I wish I didn't feel my girls' moods as I do. When they are cross, I feel it in my knees. I'm too sensitive. Freddy, dear, ask Miss Carter to bring me a hot-water bag. Oh, wait a minute! I want to speak to you. I—"

Something in the next room fell with a thud against the door; Frederica fled. Mrs. Payton sighed and shut her eyes, pressing the fresh fragrance of the violets against her hot face.

"Why does she mind him?" she thought, with languid resentment. "If she was only like Aunt Adelaide! I wonder if she'll remember to tell Miss Carter to get my hot-water bag."

Frederica did remember, but she did not tell Miss Carter: she never went into that room in the ell when she could help it. She filled the hot-water bag herself, brought it to Mrs. Payton, suggested bed instead of the big chair, and vanished into the welcome silence of her own room.

Later, in the dining-room, as she dreamed over her solitary dinner, she roused herself to tell Flora that she was to go out to the bungalow the next day. "You've got to get up a bully supper for me, Flora. Mr. Maitland is coming."

There was no reply, and Frederica looked up. "What's the matter? You got a headache, too?"

"I was expecting a friend o' mine would call on me to-morrow night," Flora said, sullenly.

Frederica was genuinely concerned. "I'm awfully sorry, but Mr. Maitland is coming to see me and I really *must* be out there. Can't you put your friend off? Who is he?"

Flora looked coy.

"Ah, now, Flora," Miss Payton said, good-naturedly, "what's all this? I must look into this!" The teasing banished the gloom for a minute or two. "Send him a little note and tell him you'll be home Saturday night," Fred suggested. She wasn't quite sure of kitchen etiquette on such matters; but, after all, why shouldn't Flora do just what her young mistress was doing?

"Maybe he will come to-night," she said, encouragingly, and Flora, with a flicker of hope, said, "Maybe he will; if he does, I guess I'll invite him to go to a movie with me next week."

"Perhaps he'll invite you," Fred said.

But Flora's hopes did not rise to such a height. "If he doesn't come in to-night, I'll send him a reg'ler written invitation to a movie," she said, happily.

CHAPTER XVII

AS things turned out, Flora might have seen her "friend" in Payton Street Friday night, had devotion prompted him to call, for the festivity at the camp was postponed for three days. The morning mail brought Frederica a brief line from Howard Maitland; he had found, he said, after he left her office, that he had to run on to Philadelphia. Back Monday morning. If her invitation held good, he'd come out to Lakeville for supper Monday night. The letter ended with some scratched-out words, which looked like, "I may have something to tell you—" The obliterated line made her glow! But the delay was disappointing. Three whole days before she could hear that "something" he wanted to tell her—and she wanted to hear! Well, it would give her more time to fix things up in the cottage. With this in view, she and Zip and Flora went out to Lakeville Sunday morning, and Fred had a silent day to keep an eye on the dusting, and work on her suffrage paper, and jolly Flora, whose plaintive dullness was beginning to be rather trying.

"You *must* brace up, Flora," she said; "you haven't half dusted the legs of the table! I don't want Mr. Maitland to think we are not good housekeepers, just because we are 'New Women,' you and I!" But Flora did not

brighten. She had telephoned the "reg'ler invitation to the movies" before leaving Payton Street, but the "friend" had only said (she told Frederica) "he'd see 'bout it. He'll write to me, and I'll git it Monday," she said. But it was evident that she had very little hope of an acceptance.

All that pleasant, hazy Sunday Frederica followed the old, old example of her grandmother, the cave-dweller, and decked her little shelter. She went into the woods and brought back an armful of maple leaves and, with Flora's melancholy assistance, fastened them against the walls and over the doors, hiding, to some extent, the frieze of fans and the yellow pennons of the Cause. She even took down the muslin curtains and washed and ironed them herself, and put them up again, crisp and dainty. The little room bloomed with her joy. When she sat down to "polish" her article she kept jumping up every few minutes to move a bowl of flowers, or put an extra book on the mantelpiece.

"I wonder," she thought, "if he can read the titles from that morris chair?" She had decided in what chair he was to sit. She tried the visual possibilities of the chair herself and, by screwing up her eyes, found she could just make out the appallingly learned names on the backs of some of the books. "*That* will show him what I'm up to!" she said.

It was the old Life Purpose—the eternal invitation! The bird preens itself, the flower pours its perfume, the girl's cheek curves like a shell. A man can almost always see the beckoning of that rosy curve, or of a little curl nestling at the back of a white neck, or of soft, shy eyes;

for so, in all the ages, Life has invited. But it has never beckoned with a German treatise!

Frederica, giving Zip a lump of sugar and making a solitary cup of tea for herself, did not know that she was beckoning. . . .

When, at five o'clock, a motor came chugging along the road, and Arthur Weston opened the door and demanded tea, he, at least, felt the invitation—which was not for him. The white curtains, the open piano; the warmth and fragrance and pleasantness, and, most of all, Frederica, sitting on a little stool by the fire, her face sparkling with welcome. Everything was beckoning!

Standing up, warming his hands at the fire while Fred ran out to the kitchen to make fresh tea for him, the caller read the names of the books lined up in a row between the lighted candles on the mantelpiece, and whistled.

"Is this your light reading?" he said, as she came back with the cream-pitcher. "For Heaven's sake, lay in some funny papers for the simple male mind!" Then he pulled Zip's ears, took his tea, and said he wished he could ever get enough sugar.

"I saw Maitland on Thursday," he said, reaching for another lump.

"Yes, he is on deck," Fred said.

Her man of business made a hopeless, laughing gesture, as if he gave up trying to solve a puzzle. "Are they engaged, or aren't they?" he said to himself. Her way of speaking of the cub was certainly as indifferent as it well could be! "But that doesn't prove anything," he thought, drearily.

He stayed a long time; he had a feeling that his call was a sort of last chapter. "In about a week I'll get one of those confounded engagement letters," he told himself. He settled down in the morris chair—the chair in which Howard was to sit the next evening—and started her talking. He did not need to make any replies. Once Frederica "got going" on her own affairs he could watch her in lazy, tender silence. . . . How soon it would be over—this watching and listening! How soon his plaything would be transformed into a happy, self-absorbed, quite uninteresting wife and mother! For Fred Maitland, he was cynically aware, would cease to interest him, because she would cease to be preposterous; she would be normal. Of course Fred Payton would always be a darling memory; she would never leave his heart. His heart ached at the thought of its own emptiness if he should try to turn Fred Payton out just because Fred Maitland was another man's wife. No, he would not even try to forget his wild, sweet, silly Freddy! She should always remain as, back somewhere in his memory, Kate remained, dark-browed and cruel. The Kate of today, whose presence in his heart would be an impropriety, was not even an individual to him! But the old Kate was his. He wondered if Fred would ever become as vague to him as Mrs. Kate——. . . . "What is her name! Oh, yes—Bailey. When I heard she'd married him, I didn't sleep for two nights; and now I can hardly remember his name! 'Men have died, and worms have eaten them—' . . . Fred, almost all the houses out here are boarded up. I only saw a light in one house."

"I was telling you of the woman's movement in Sweden," she said, affronted.

"I'd like to see a woman's movement back to town from this cottage! You really ought not to be out here at night, just you and Flora. That one house which is open will be closed pretty soon, I suppose?"

"To-morrow," she teased him. "And Flora and I are such fragile flowers, it's dreadful to think of our losing the protection of Mr. and Mrs. Monks! He is a paralytic, and she weighs two hundred and twenty-five pounds."

"You'll move in town to-morrow, won't you?" he said, really disturbed.

She had to admit that she expected to. "Not that I'm nervous, but Howard Maitland is coming here to supper to-morrow night, and I'm going to make him take us back in his car because I've got such a lot of stuff to carry home."

"Oh," he said, blankly. "He's coming out to supper?" He stared into the fire for a while; then he got on his feet. "I must start," he said, and stood looking down at her. "Fred," he said, suddenly—in the uncertain firelight his face seemed to quiver—"you're a good fellow. And if your husband, when you get him, isn't the finest thing that ever happened, I'll punch his head!"

His voice was so moved that she, sitting on her little stool, close to the hearth, looked up at him, quickly. "Why, he's *fond* of me!" she thought. Her own deep experience made her heart open into generous acceptance of any human affection. She jumped up and put both

impulsive hands into his. "You are the dearest friend I have!" she said; then hesitated, laughed—and kissed him.

Her lips against his cheek were softly cool, like the touch of flowers. Nothing that she had ever said or done removed her more completely from the possibility of passion. He was able, however, to make a grandfatherly rejoinder to the effect that he had dandled her on his knee when she was a brat—which was not strictly true, for he had had no inclination to dandle the gawky fourteen-year-old Freddy Payton on knees that were bent before the cruel Kate. He put a friendly—but shrinking—hand on her shoulder as she went with him to the front door, and a minute later waved good night from his car. As he drove home in a bothering white fog from the lake, he was very unhappy. "It hurts more than I supposed it could," he told himself. "I don't like this kind of 'amusement!' Damn it, I wish she hadn't kissed me."

As for Frederica, going back into the cottage, her eyes were very kind. "He's an old dear to bother with me; I'm awfully fond of him." Then she forgot him. "Twenty-four hours more," she was thinking, "and Howard will be here!" Twenty-four hours seemed a long time! She was glad when the moment came to blow out the candles and look into the other room to say good night; ("only twenty hours now!").

Flora, at the kitchen table, was listlessly shuffling a pack of cards by the light of a little kerosene-lamp; as Fred entered, she dropped her head in her hands and sighed. Frederica sighed, too. "I suppose I've got to

cheer her up," she thought, resignedly. "What's the matter?" she said, kindly.

"Nothin'."

"Come in the other room and I'll play for you."

Flora shook a dreary head. Fred, with a shrug of impatience, sat down at the other end of the table. The fire in the stove was out and the kitchen was cold and damp; except for the lisping wash of the lake and the faint fall of Flora's cards, everything was very still. Fred watched the cards for a moment without speaking, then abruptly brushed them all aside and clapped her warm young hand on Flora's thin wrist. The movement made the lamp flicker, and on the opposite wall two shadowy heads nodded at each other.

"Now, Flora," she said, "we'll have this out! What *is* the matter?"

"I tell you, Miss Freddy, there ain't nothin' the matter."

"There is! You're awfully depressed."

"I'm used to that."

"But why? Come now, you've got to tell me!"

Flora dropped her head on her arms and began to cry.

"Flora! Flora! What shall I do with you? You are so silly!"

The woman sat up and wiped her eyes. The little hysterical outburst evidently relieved her; she smiled, though her lips still trembled. "I was tellin' my fortune to see what kind of a letter I'd git to-morrow mornin' from my friend about goin' to the movies. I like 'em, but 'pears he ain't stuck on 'em. An'—an', I'm bettin' he'll say he

won't go. The cards make out I ain't goin' to have no luck."

"Nonsense! You've got too much sense to believe in cards."

"Miss Freddy, Mr. Maitland 'll think the house real pretty the way you fixed up them leaves. Some of 'em is as handsome as if they was hand-painted!"

Fred preserved a grave face, and said yes, the leaves were lovely.

"An' he's comin' out to-morrow night?" Flora said, nodding her head. "Well, I guess *you're* happy." Her opaque black eyes gleamed with unshed tears. Frederica, rising, put an impulsive arm around her; Flora suddenly sobbed on her shoulder.

"Is it because your beau has been unkind?" Fred said. She used Flora's own vernacular.

"I 'ain't never had a real beau. Oh, well, I don't care! I'm glad you got a beau, anyhow."

"I don't know that I have," Fred said, smiling. "But you'll get one some day." Under her friendly words was a good-natured contempt—Flora was so anxious for a "beau"!

"An' your gentleman 'll come out here to-morrow night," Flora repeated,—it was as if she turned the knife in her own wound; "an' you and him 'll set in the living-room. And you'll talk. And he'll talk. An' he'll . . . kiss you."

"Oh," Fred said, laughing, "Mr. Maitland and I are not interested in *that* kind of thing! We are trying to give women the vote, and to make the world better—that's what we are going to talk about. And, Flora, remember,

you've got to give us an awfully good supper! Come, now! you're tired. You really must go to bed."

She laid a gently compelling hand on the frail shoulder, and Flora, sighing miserably, took the lamp from its bracket and followed Miss Freddy up-stairs to the cubby-hole under the roof where she slept.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE next day it rained and the little house was dark and damp. Across the sodden beach-grass Fred and Flora could see the fat woman in the next bungalow moving her trunks and her paralyzed husband back to town; when they had gone, the owner of the bungalow came to give a look around and see how much damage his tenants had done. Then he closed the shutters and boarded up the front door. By noon the sound of his hammering ceased, and the shore, with its huddle of cottages, was entirely deserted. The only human sign was the wisp of smoke from Fred's chimney. All the morning it rained heavily. At ten o'clock Flora put on her things and walked nearly a mile to the post-office. She came back soaking-wet, and empty-handed.

"Didn't he write?" Fred asked, cheerfully.

Flora shook a forlorn head. But when she had had a cup of tea there was a rally of hope. "Them postmen! They're always losin' letters. I shouldn't wonder if my friend's letter was stickin' in a mail-box, somewheres."

"Very likely!" Fred said. She really didn't know what she said; her joyous preoccupation was only aware of Time—"six hours more, and he'll be here!" At noon the rain ceased and the fog crept in. Some yellow

leaves blew up on the porch; a squirrel ran down the chestnut-tree at the corner of the cottage, lifted an alert tail, looked about, then ran up again. After that everything was still.

The lake was smothered in a woolly whiteness that muffled even the lapping of the waves. It muffled one's mind, Frederica thought. She wished she had something to do—housework or anything! "I haven't the brains to work on my article; I'm only intelligent enough to be domestic!" But there was nothing domestic to be done; everything was swept and garnished. She tried to read; she tried to write; said "darn it!" to both book and pen, then got up to walk about and stare out of the window into the wetness. At last, in desperation, she put on her things, called Zip, and went out into the mist to tramp for an hour under the dripping branches. When they came back, Zip horribly muddy, Fred was as fresh as a rain-wet rose, and full of the joy of living. "Only four hours now!"

In the kitchen she wiped Zippy's reluctant paws, and told Flora, who was sitting motionless, her hands idle in her lap, to hang her sou'wester up to dry. "Now, Flora, come to life!" she said. "If you come into the living-room I'll play for you."

Flora shook her head. "There ain't no use listenin' to music. There ain't no use in anything. You get up in the morning and button your boots. Well, you gotta do it the next day," Flora said, with staring eyes, "an' the next. An' the next. What's the use? There's no use." But after serving her young lady with a somewhat sketchy

luncheon, she did go into the other room, and after helping to start the dying fire, crouched on the floor, her head against the piano, and listened to Fred's friendly drumming.

"Trouble with you," said Frederica, looking down at the crouching figure, "is that you've nothing to do that you care awfully about doing."

Flora was silent, and by and by Fred forgot her, for, velvet-footed, through the fog, the hour when Howard should arrive came nearer, and her own life grew so vivid that the moping brown woman ceased to exist for her—except, indeed, for momentary pangs of fear that Flora would make some blunder—roast the duck a minute too long, or forget to put pieces of orange on the sizzling breast just before serving it!

He had said he would come at five. But it was nearly six before she heard the car panting in the road. She opened the door, and, holding a candle above her head, told him he needn't expect anything so swell as a garage. "Just run her up under that big chestnut!" Then she put the candle down on the porch, and went out to help him lift the top, for the moisture was dripping like rain from the branches.

"But the fog is clearing," she said, with satisfaction. She did not add that she had been anxious at the idea of his poking back on the wood road in the thick mist. Such concern was an absolutely new sensation to Frederica. She had never in all her life felt anxious about anybody!

The top up, they went into the fire-lit room, warm and fragrant and comfortable, with the candles burning on the

mantelpiece on either side of the learned books. The supper was a great success. Flora had "come to life," and the duck was perfect; indeed, she even brightened, for an instant, under Mr. Maitland's appreciation: "Flora, I take off my hat to that duck. You are a bully cook!"

"She is!" Fred said, heartily. But Flora's face gloomed again.

"Bully!" Howard repeated. His vocabulary was never very large, and hunger made it smaller than usual. He was, however, able to tell Fred that he had missed Laura in Philadelphia.

"Strikes me she's gadding about a good deal; she's gone to Boston. What's the clue?"

"Just a good time. Lolly is rather young still, you know," Fred excused her. Howard made no comment, and she had an uncomfortable feeling that he did not appreciate Laura. "I pretty nearly went with her, myself!" she declared, boldly. She wasn't going to have even Howard think Laura was frivolous! "She's the sweetest thing going," she said.

"You bet she is," Howard agreed, and began to talk about shells.

When they had finished the last scrap of dessert, the young man put what was left of his beer on the mantelpiece, and, his pipe drawing well, stood up with his back to the fire, and told her about the pearl he had found.

"I want to show it to you," he said; and, digging it up out of his pocket, dropped it into her extended hand. "I'm going to have it set in a—a ring," he explained, as it lay, round and shimmering, in Fred's palm. "Of course,

I could buy a bigger one, and more perfect. But there's a kind of association in a pearl you pick up yourself—don't you think?"

"Of course there is!"

"Put it there, on your finger, and let's see how it looks," he said, his head on one side, his eyes anxious. She balanced it as well as she could on the back of her hand, then returned it to him hurriedly. "Pretty good?" he said.

"Fine!" she assured him. Then, resolutely, changed the subject; there must be no talk about rings—*yet!*

Howard, a little disappointed at her indifference, put the pearl, in its wisp of tissue-paper, into his pocket, and listened to the outpouring of her plans for the winter work of the league. In the midst of it, he kicked the logs together in the fireplace, and, sitting down, smoked comfortably. Once he said that one of her arguments was bully, and once he called her attention to the way the sparks marched and countermarched in the soot on the chimney back; "I used to call 'em 'soldiers' when I was a kid."

"I meant to read you my paper," Fred was saying, "but I guess it will keep. Let's talk. Howard, Laura and I are going to get all the girls we know to take a stand —this is a pretty serious thing!—against playing around with men we know are dissipated. The idea grew out of this bill we're trying to get before the Legislature."

"Good work!" he said, lazily, and leaned forward to knock the ashes out of his pipe. Zip yawned and curled up on the skirt of Freddy's dress. It was a warm, domestic scene, full of peaceful certainties.

"You see," she said, "women are facing facts, nowadays. They believe in freedom, but they believe most of all in Truth. There'll be no more hiding behind a lot of conventions! That is what has held us back. We have as much right to say what we—feel, as men. Don't you think so?" Her voice was a little breathless.

Howard, looking dreamily at the "soldiers," said, absently, "You bet you have!"

"I want to tell you just what we're up to about turning down the rotten fellows," Fred said. "I want to talk it out with you and get your advice. But not now, because—because there are other things I want to say. But sometime."

"Any time! I've just been laying for a jaw with you, Fred. I don't know any other woman I can talk to just as I can to a man!"

At that, she couldn't help a little proud movement of her head, and to hide her pride she stooped down and stroked Zippy; as she did so the firelight fell on her face, smiling, and quivering a little. Her good gray eyes brimmed with joy. "Yes, we are pretty good friends," she said.

"You see," he said, "you *understand!* Why, those letters of yours—I can't tell you what they meant to me!" He paused and laughed: "That reminds me. I told Leighton—you know the man I wrote to you about?"

"The anti man?"

"Yes; Tommy Leighton—"

"I'll send him a bunch of literature—if he has any kind of mind?"

"Oh, well; so-so. He's an anti, so what can you expect? I told him that you had the finest mind of any woman I had ever met. I told him that mighty few men could talk back to you—" He paused to fumble about in his pocket for his tobacco-pouch. "Laura gave me that," he interpolated; "Leighton said—"

She leaned forward and laid her hand on his arm; the suddenness of her grip made him drop the little pouch, and as he stooped to pick it up, she said:

"I've missed you—awfully."

He did not see that she was trembling. He put the pouch in his pocket and retorted, gaily:

"I bet you haven't missed me as much as I've missed you!"

"I've missed you," she said, in a whisper, "*more!*"

Howard Maitland stopped midway in a breath. But instantly the thought that leaped into his mind vanished in shame. He actually blushed with consternation at his own caddishness. He tried to say, again, something about her letters—but she was not listening; she was saying, calmly:

"You see—I love you."

He was dumb. His brain whirled. He said to himself that he hadn't understood her—of course he hadn't understood her! What had she said? Good Lord! what *had* she said? Of course she didn't mean—what you might think! She only meant—friendship. If he let her know what, for just one gasping moment he had thought she meant, somebody ought to kick him! But the shock of her words brought him to his feet. She rose, too, and

stood smiling at him. "Of course," he began, "we are—you are—I mean, I don't know what I would have done without your let—"

"I love you," she said. She held out both her hands—"will you marry me, Howard?"

He had it, then, between the eyes. His boyish stumbling ceased. He caught her hands in his.

"Fred," he began—a door banged in the kitchen and they both started, "Fred," he said, again—his throat was dry, and he stopped to swallow. Instinctively she was drawing away from him; the smiling offer was still in her eyes, but a frightened look lay behind it. He did not try to hold the withdrawing hands.

"Fred, I care for you so much—" He was white with pain. Frederica was silent. "I care for you so terribly, I—I have to be—straight. I never thought—" She made a gesture, and he stopped.

"It's all right. I understand. You needn't go on."

"Fred! Look here—I care for you more than I can tell you. You are—you are simply stunning; but—"

She laughed: "Cut it out, Howard; cut it out! I understand."

"You don't!" he said, greatly agitated; "you can't understand how—how I appreciate—I shall never forget—"

She motioned him back to his chair, and dropped into her own. "You needn't worry about me. I've made a mistake, that's all. Many a man has done the same thing and lived through it. I assure you I sha'n't pine!"

She was very pale, but smiling finely. He sat down.

His confusion was agonizing. He was trying to think how he could tell her what she meant to him; how he respected, admired—yes, *loved* her! Only not—not just in the way she meant. He tried to say this, then stopped, realizing, dazed as he was, that his explanations only made things worse.

"I am not worthy of the friendship of a woman as noble as you are!"

"Oh, nonsense! Let's talk of important things."

"No, but listen," he entreated, with emotion. "You won't turn me down? You're the best friend I have—we won't stop being friends?"

"You'll 'be a brother to me'?" she quoted; it was her only bitter word; and she covered it with a laugh. "'Course we are pals, always! Howard, I want to tell you what I accomplished here this summer. And oh, by the way, did you give 'Aunty Leighton' the pamphlet on the New Zealand situation?" She pulled Zip up on her lap, and teased him, kissing him between his eyes, and squeezing his little nose in her hand.

Howard said, as casually as his breath permitted, that Tommy Leighton was a fine chap—"but no mind, you know. One of those people you can't argue with on any really serious subject like suffrage. Opinions all run into molds. Can't bend 'em." Now that he had got started talking, he couldn't stop; he talked faster and faster; he told her everything he had ever heard or surmised about Mr. Leighton; "his ideas belong to the dark ages—"

"Believes in sex slavery, I suppose?" Fred interposed.

"Exactly! I—I guess I'd better be getting along," he

said, with a sort of gasp. Her instant acquiescence, in springing to her feet, was at once a relief and a stab.

"Would you mind," she said, easily, "putting a basket into your tonneau and leaving it at our house? Flora and I will have such a lot of things to carry in town to-morrow."

As she spoke, she was listening with satisfaction to her own voice—calm, matter-of-fact, friendly.

He said he would be delighted to take the basket—"or anything else! Load me up, and I'll deliver the goods in Payton Street to-night!"

"Oh, no; it's too late," she said, laughing; "but if you'll take it around in the morning—"

"Of course I will; delighted!"

"I'll tell Flora to take it out to the car," she said; and went into the kitchen: "Flo—" she began, and stopped. The kitchen was empty. "Flora!" she called, looking at the unwashed dishes in the sink, and at Flora's untasted supper set out on the kitchen table in the midst of a clutter of cards. She said a single distracted word under her breath; went to the foot of the stairs and called up to the little cell under the eaves. . . . No answer. She ran up and looked into each room. . . . No Flora.

"She seems to have vanished," she said, coming into the living-room with a puzzled look. "She isn't in the house. Do you suppose she can be wandering about in the woods at this time of the night?" In her own mind, frantic at Howard's delayed departure, she was saying to herself: "I'll die if I don't get rid of him! I could *kill* Flora!" She sat down again by the fire, and said that

she was bothered about Zippy's eyes; that made a momentary diversion. Howard examined the little dog's eyes and said they were all right; then made desultory remarks about dogs in China. He was trying, wildly, to find something—*anything!*—to say. Both were listening intently for Flora's step. "I'll see if I can find her now," Frederica said.

He followed her into the empty kitchen. "Bird flown?" he said. He, too, was pleased to find he could speak so casually. Frederica opened the back door and strained her eyes into the mist.

"It's awfully funny," she said; "why should she go out into the fog? *Flora!*" she called loudly—and they held their breaths for an answering voice. But there was only the muffled lapping of the waves and an occasional drop falling from the big tree. They went back to the living-room, and looked at each other, blankly.

"Can she have started to walk into town?" he asked.

"Thirty miles? Howard, I am sort of worried about her! Do you remember? the door slammed, and—" she stopped short, remembering just when she had heard that slamming door. "Do you think she can have been ill, and gone out to one of the other houses for help? No," she corrected herself. "She knows every house in Lakeville is closed!"

Again she ran up-stairs, calling and looking; then they both went out on the back porch, and called.

Again the lake answered them, lapping—lapping.

CHAPTER XIX

"YOU can't stay here by yourself," he said.

"I can't go back to town and leave Flora here by herself. We've got to find her!"

He nodded; they were both of them entirely at ease. That tense consciousness of a few minutes before had disappeared.

"I'm worried," Fred said, again; "she was awfully low-spirited because—because somebody hadn't written to her."

"Oh, she's all right. She'll be back in a few minutes."

"But where has she gone?"

"Perhaps she walked into Laketon."

"What for? Besides, it's nearly five miles!" They were standing in the kitchen doorway; Zip pushed past them and went out into the mist; smelled about, stretching first his front legs, then his hind legs. The motor loomed like a black monster under the tree. Zip gave a bored look at the lingering guest.

"*Flor-a-a!*"

No answer; just the lake, sighing and rippling in the sedge.

"Could she have gone down to the water?" Howard

said; "have you got such a thing as a lantern? I'll go out and look."

"No; but light that lamp on the center-table—a candle might blow out."

He went into the other room, and she heard him scratch a match and fumble with the lamp-chimney. In that minute, alone, listening all the while for Flora's returning step, her mind leaped back to that moment in front of the fire. His look—astounded, incredulous, shocked—was burned into her memory; his distressed words rung in her ears. She was not conscious of any pain because he did not love her. She was simply stunned by the jolt of suddenly and unexpectedly stepping down into the old, irrational modesties. . . .

Her face began to scorch. She went out on the porch and called again, mechanically; some water dripping from the eaves on her bare head ran down one blazing cheek; the coolness gave her an acute sense of relief that struggled through the medley of tearing emotions; she was saying to herself: "Where can she be? She hasn't washed the dishes! (*He refused me.*)"

Howard, holding the lamp over his head, came up behind her and went down the steps into the mist. Fred followed him, Zip lumbering along at her heels.

"She must have left the house this way; we know that," she said.

"Come down to the beach," he said.

"Yes; sometimes she used to sit on that big rock," Frederica remembered.

He walked ahead of her; the light, shining through the

solferino lamp-shade, made a rosy nimbus about his bare head, but scarcely penetrated the fog. They went thus, all three, single file, along the path to the rickety wooden pier; at the end of it, they stood staring out into the mist. Twice he called, loudly, "*Flora!*" . . .

"Not a sound!" he said. "Is there any possible place in the house where she could have hidden herself? I mean, gone to sleep, or anything?"

"Not a place! I've looked everywhere. (*He refused me.*)"

They turned silently to go back. Just as they reached the path again Howard stopped—so abruptly that the lamp sent a jarring gleam into the white darkness.

"*Fred—?*"

She looked where he was looking, and caught her breath.

"No!" she said; "oh, no—no! It can't be!"

"Hold the lamp. I'll go and see—"

He climbed down the little bluff and waded into the sedge. The swaying mass that had looked like a stone until a larger wave stirred it, came in nearer the shore, caught on the shoaling beach, rolled, and was still. Frederica saw him bend over it, then try, frantically, to lift it in his arms. She put the lamp on the wharf. ("Don't touch it, Zip!"), slid, catching at tufts of grass, and bending branches—down the crumbling bank, plunged into the water up to her knees, and together, half pulling, half carrying that sodden bundle, they stumbled over the oozy bottom and through the sedges. The lifting it up the bluff was terrible; the dripping figure, sagging and bending, was so heavy!

"We must get her into the house," Frederica panted. And, somehow or other, they did it, Howard taking the shoulders, and Fred the feet. They were gasping with the strain of it when they laid her on the floor of the living-room.

"Is she dead?" he said.

Frederica thrust her hand into the bosom of Flora's dress—and held her breath.

"I can't tell; we mustn't stop to find out! You know what to do? Pull her arms up, this way!"

They stood over her, Howard following Fred's short, sharp directions, and, even in the horror of the moment, conscious of a wondering admiration at her efficiency. But no quiver of life came into the still face.

"We ought to get a doctor!" Fred said, at last, panting.

"I'll go instantly!"

"No, the quickest way will be to take her to a doctor, not bring a doctor to her!"

"But if she is dead we ought not to move her! That's the law."

"Law? I don't care anything about the law! Life is what I'm thinking of! We don't know whether she's dead or not. Crank your car! I'll get some blankets—"

He hurried out, and she rushed up-stairs for blankets. She was folding them about Flora when he came in, the car chugging loudly at the door. Again, lifting and straining, they carried her out, and got her into the tonneau. Then Frederica saw the lamp down on the wharf, burning steadily in the mist.

"Put it out! Put it out! Hurry!" she commanded;

and while he ran to do it she darted back to blow out the candles in the living-room and snap the lock of the front door—"never mind about taking the lamp into the house. Leave it on the porch!" she said. Then she got in the car and, sitting down, put an arm about the crumpling, sodden form. Zip, fearful of being left, jumped on the front seat, and glanced wonderingly back at his mistress.

"Fred," Howard said, agitatedly, "I think she's—dead."

"So do I; but *hurry!* Don't lose a minute!" Then, through the noise of the clutch, she screamed at him: "Doctor Emma Holt! In Laketon!" And the car jerked forward.

"But that's a woman doctor," he called, over his shoulder.

Just for a moment the habit of revolt asserted itself: "*Why not?*" Then, "Hurry! Hurry!"

Dr. Emma Holt was five miles away. "I felt," Howard Maitland used to say, afterward, "as if she were fifty miles away!"

The fog was so thick it was impossible to speed with safety, so they sped without it, and tore bumping along through the white smother. Twice he looked around, and saw Fred sitting there, rigid, with that face, open-mouthed, open-eyed, gray under its brown skin, wabbling, and dripping on her shoulder.

"She is magnificent!" he thought. "*I* couldn't do it."

The second time he looked, some reflection from the lamps, gleaming in the fog, flickered on that set face, and it seemed as if the eyes closed, then opened again. The horror of it made his hand jerk on the wheel, and there

was a skid out of the ruts that frightened him into carefulness.

When he sprang out at the house of the "woman doctor," he dared not glance back into the tonneau. Hammering on the panels of the door, and keeping his thumb on the bell, he called up to an opening window on the second floor:

"Doctor! Hurry! A woman has got drowned! Hurry!"

"Where is she?" came a laconic voice from the window.

"Here! In my car! Hurry!"

The window slammed down; a minute later the electric lights were snapped on in the sleeping house, and hurrying feet came along the hall.

CHAPTER XX

"OF course," Dr. Holt said, when it was plain that nothing more could be done, "you ought to have left her where she was."

"But we didn't know whether she was alive—" they excused themselves.

"Was there anything the matter with her?" the doctor said; she was beginning to think of the certificate she must make out. "Was she low-spirited?"

"She was dreadfully disappointed because she didn't get a letter she was expecting."

"Love-letter?"

"I don't know," Frederica said.

She and Howard had left the office, where the dead woman lay on the doctor's lounge, and were standing in the front hall, side by side, like two children who were being scolded. From above the hat-rack, a mounted stag's head watched them with faintly gleaming eyes. Dr. Holt, a woman with a strong, bad-tempered face, was plainly out of patience with them both.

"I've got to get the coroner," she said, frowning; "and it's nearly twelve o'clock." Then she asked a question that was like a little shock of electricity to the two who, in this last terrifying hour, had entirely forgotten themselves. "Did she have any love-affair?"

"Yes," Frederica said, in a low voice. ("*He refused me.*")

"Tell me, please," Dr. Holt persisted.

"She was—in love."

"I suppose she was all right? I mean, respectable?"

"Flora?" Fred said, with a recoil of anger, "of course she was respectable."

"That's what I thought. Man desert her? You spoke of a letter—perhaps she was hoping to hear from him?"

"No, he didn't exactly desert her. I mean, she thought somebody was in love with her, several times. But none of the men seemed—" Frederica's hands clutched together—"to want her. So she was unhappy."

"Oh," said the doctor. "Yes. I understand. Quite frequent in women of her age. She would have been all right if she hadn't been—respectable; or even if she'd got religion, good and hard. Religion," said Dr. Holt, writing rapidly in a memorandum-book, "is a safety-valve for the unmarried woman in the forties, whose work doesn't interest her."

"Flora was as good as anybody could be!" Fred said, hotly.

"Oh, I didn't mean any reflection on her character," said the doctor, kindly, "I merely meant that any woman who hasn't either work, or religion, or marriage, generally gets out of kilter, mentally. Of course," she meditated, tapping her chin with her fountain-pen, "you two must go to the coroner's with me."

In the next hour and a half, of driving about to find the coroner, then the undertaker, then arranging what was

to be done with the body, the "two" had no time for the self-consciousness that the doctor's words had rekindled —except for just one moment: they had come back to Dr. Holt's house, and again were standing in the entry, below the deer's head. In the office, the coroner was questioning Dr. Holt. The office door was ajar.

"This man, Maitland; do you know anything about him? Is he all right? Of course, you never can tell—"

At that, they couldn't help looking at each other, with a flash of what might have been, under other conditions, amusement.

"Why, he's Howard Maitland!" they heard Dr. Holt say; "you know? The Maitland Iron Works!"

"Oh!" the coroner apologized, "I didn't get on to that! 'Course he's all right."

Then Dr. Holt: "It appears the poor woman tried to get married, but she couldn't find a husband. So she killed herself."

This time the two in the hall did not look at each other. Fred stared up at the stag's glistening eyes. Howard buckled and unbuckled his driving-gauntlets. For the rest of her life, Frederica never saw a mounted deer's head without a stab of remembrance.

It was nearly four o'clock in the morning when everything was attended to and Howard turned his car homeward. "Do sit in front with me, Fred," he said; "you *can't* sit back there in the tonneau."

"All right," she said, absently, and, getting in, pulled Zippy on to her lap. As she sat down, she suddenly realized that Howard's request implied that he felt an em-

barrassment for her which she was not feeling for herself. She began to feel it soon enough! Embarrassment flowed in upon them both. Howard talked about Flora—then fell silent: ("She 'tried to get married'!") Then Fred talked about her—and fell silent. ("He needn't worry; *I* won't drown myself!")

The ride into town was forever! The bleary October dawn had whitened in the mist like a dead face, before they drew up at 15 Payton Street, and for the last ten miles they did not exchange a word. Fred was thinking, dazedly, of Flora; but every now and then would come the stab: "*He refused me.*"

Howard was thinking only of Fred. "Stunning!" he was saying to himself. "She's not a girl! She's a man—no, I don't know any man who would have done what she did. *I* couldn't have, anyway. I take off my hat to courage like that!"

Not a girl? Fred, not a girl? . . .

When at last that dreadful night was over, and he had left the terrified Payton household, Frederica—the wonderful, the superwoman (superman, even, compared with Howard himself!), Frederica had, in a flash, been something less than superwoman; she had been pitifully, stupidly, incredibly feminine.

It was six o'clock in the morning when he closed Mrs. Payton's front door behind him and went out to get in his car—giving a shuddering glance at that pool of water on the floor of the tonneau. Just as he was throwing in his clutch he heard the door open again, and Fred called

to him. He went back, quickly; she was standing on the top step, haggard, ugly, dripping wet; a lock of hair had blown across her cheek, which was twitching painfully. She put out her hand to him, in a blind sort of gesture, but she did not look at him.

"I just wanted—to say," she said, and paused, for the jangle of the mules' bells and the clatter of a passing car drowned her voice;—"I wanted to—to say," she began again, with a gasp, "don't—" she stopped, with a sobbing laugh; "don't—tell Laura."

Don't tell!

Oh, she was a girl all right!—so Howard's thoughts ran as he drove home in the mist that had thickened into rain; Fred was a girl—a trembling, ignorant, frightened feminine creature! Suppose she did support a dead woman in her arms during that dreadful ride in the fog; suppose she did stand by, promptly obedient to the doctor's orders in that frantic time of endeavor in the office; suppose she had decided, quietly and wisely, exactly what was to be done, when it was plain that Flora's poor, melancholy little life had flown; suppose the coroner did say that he had never seen such nerve; suppose all those things—yet she had said those two pitiful words: "*Don't tell.*" Yes, Fred Payton was a "girl"!

"You can talk all you want to about the 'new woman,'" Howard said, "I guess human nature doesn't change much. . . ."

It changes so little, that at that revealing instant on the Paytons' front steps, with the light of the Egyptian

maid's globe streaming out into the rain, he had wanted to put his arms around Freddy and kiss her! Who knows but what, if there had not been all those weeks of rocking about on the mud flats, listening to the eternal dry rustle of the blowing palms, dredging for shells, and bothering about Jack McKnight, he might not, then and there, in spite of the wonderfulness of her, and because of the weakness of her, have fallen in love with old Freddy? As it was, when she said that piteous, feminine thing, the tears had stung in his eyes; he wrung her hand, stammering out: "*Never!* Why, I—you—" But the door closed in his face, and he went back to climb into his motor and go off to his own house.

That was at six o'clock; it was nine before Mr. and Mrs. Childs—summoned, to Billy-boy's great annoyance, while he was shaving—reached No. 15. They found Mrs. Holmes there ahead of them, and met Mr. Weston on the door-step.

In the parlor, watched by Andy Payton's sightless eyes, the court sat upon Freddy—for, of course, the whole distressing affair was her fault—she had dragged poor, crazy Flora out to that shocking camp! "I said last spring it was perfec' nonsense," Mr. Childs vociferated—"a girl, renting a bungalow! Why did you allow it, Ellen?"

"My dear William! I was perfectly helpless. Girls do anything nowadays. When I was a young lady—"

"*My* girl doesn't do 'anything,'" Laura's father said; "as for Freddy, the newspapers will ring with it! Pleasant for me. My niece, alone with that Maitland fellow! I've always distrusted him. Going off to dig shells—a

man with his income! That showed there's something queer about him. And Fred alone with him in that bungalow mixed up with a murder!"

Mrs. Holmes screamed.

"Well, suicide. Same thing. It will all come out," said Billy-boy, standing up with his back to the fire and puffing; "Bessie is really sick at the scandal."

"Oh, now, Father, I—"

"He's got to marry her," said Mrs. Holmes.

"She helped Mr. Maitland carry Flora out of the water," Mrs. Payton was explaining; "he told me about it. He said she was very brave, but I know she got her feet wet; and I always tell her there's no surer way to take cold than to get your feet wet. And poor Flora! She hasn't any relations, as far as I can find out; so whom can I notify? When I went to housekeeping, servants always came from somewhere, and if they got sick you knew where to send them. I don't want to be unkind, but, really, it was very inconsiderate in Flora. I suppose she never thought how hard it would be for Freddy—"

"Where is Fred, at this moment?" Mr. Weston interrupted.

"Well, she means to be kind, I'm sure," Mrs. Payton said, "but I do wish she wasn't so extreme! She has actually gone to the undertaking place—you know they sent Flora in this morning to Colby's—with some roses. American Beauties, and you know how much they cost at this season! She wanted to put them on the coffin herself, and—"

"Oh, *do* stop talking about such unpleasant things!" Mrs. Holmes said.

"Well, I merely meant that it is unnecessary. As I say, Flora has no relatives, so no one will ever know of the attention. It's just another wild thing for Freddy to do."

"Possibly Flora will know it," Mr. Weston said; "at least, wouldn't the Reverend Tait say so?"

"Oh," Mrs. Holmes said, frowning, "we are not speaking of religion. Flora was just a servant." Even Mr. Childs winced at that, and for once Arthur Weston's face was candid.

"I suppose *that* will get into the newspapers, too," said Mrs. Holmes—"'A young society girl puts roses' . . . and all the rest of the horrid vulgarity of it."

"I don't think human kindness is ever vulgar," Mr. Weston said, "and I am sure there will be no improper publicity. Maitland and I have been to all the newspaper offices."

"Alone, at midnight, in an auto!" Mrs. Holmes lamented.

"Death is an impeccable chaperon," Weston said. ("*That* will shut her up!" he thought, and it did, for a while.)

"To think of such a thing happening to one of my servants," Mrs. Payton bewailed herself; "and I was always so considerate of them!"

Mrs. Holmes said there was too much consideration for servants, anyhow. "Let them work! There isn't one of them that will dust the legs of a piano unless you stand

over her! Of course, I'm sorry for Flora; I only wish I wasn't so sensitive! But she did starch her table linen too much, Ellen; you can't deny that."

"Who is going to pay the funeral expenses?" Mr. Childs said. "Does the city do that, Weston, or is it up to Ellen?"

"Oh, Mrs. Payton has no responsibilities about Death —only Life," said Arthur Weston, grimly.

"Of course I will attend to all that!" Flora's employer said; "anyhow, her wages for the last month are not due until next week. But, of course, I shall do everything that is proper."

"Well," William Childs said, "I must be moving along. I was going to work out a new Baconian cipher this morning, but, of course, this wretched business has knocked my mind into a cocked hat! Come, Bessie. Bessie's perfectly sick over the whole thing. She has her Bridge Club this afternoon, and this awful affair has completely upset her. Good-by, Nelly; let me know if there is anything I can do," and he hustled Mrs. Childs—who kept insisting, mildly, that she was so sorry for poor, dear Freddy—out of the room. At the door, he paused to call back: "This new cipher doesn't leave the Shakespearians a leg to stand on!"

Mrs. Holmes and Mr. Weston lingered, Mrs. Holmes declaring that William Childs ought to learn to speak distinctly—"he mumbles terribly"—and Weston, silent and rather wan, walking up and down, waiting for Frederica's return.

When they heard the key in the front door, the two

ladies stopped talking; it was Arthur Weston who went into the hall to take Fred's hand and help her off with her coat. She hung her hat up beside her father's and gave her old friend a grim look.

"Has Billy-boy put on the black cap yet? Or does grandmother demand that Howard shall 'make an honest woman' of me before the sun sets? I know what you've been up against!"

"You are perfectly exhausted," he said, tenderly; "go up-stairs; I'll fight it out."

"No," she said, briefly.

She went into the parlor, looked at her grandmother, shrugged her shoulders, and girded herself for battle: "I'll tell you the whole story. Poor Flora has been suffering, probably for a year or more, the doctor says, from some mental deterioration. She was restless and unhappy. Of course, we knew that, because she did her work badly—which inconvenienced us. As far as she was concerned, it didn't trouble us. She was restless, because she wanted to be married and settle down. And nobody wanted her; which seemed to us just—funny. But when you come to think of it, it isn't very funny not to be wanted. . . . When she couldn't marry, she tried to get interested in something—music, or anything. She wanted to *do* something."

"Do something? Well, I could have giv—"

"I tried to make things better for her," Fred went on, heavily, "but I suppose I didn't try hard enough. Well, anyhow, she saw I was in love with Howard—" a little shock ran through her hearers; she paused, and looked at

them, faintly surprised; "why, you knew I was in love with him, didn't you? He isn't with me; not in the least. And Flora's young man wasn't in love with her. He promised to write to her, and he didn't. And that upset her a good deal. But I think the thing that really hit her hardest was to see how I felt, and how happy I was. I—I slopped over, I suppose, a good deal. It was a sort of last straw to Flora to see me so happy; it made her—well, envious, I suppose. Poor old Flora! she needn't have been."

She stopped and put her hand across her eyes, rubbing them wearily. "I tell you these details merely to explain why I didn't get on to the fact sooner that she had gone out of the house—I was so absorbed in Howard. The door *did* slam, but just at that moment I was . . . saying something to him. So I didn't really notice. Then, afterward, he and I talked and talked, until it was time for him to go home; and then we discovered—" She caught her breath and was silent for a moment.

Her mother was quite overcome. "So distressing for you, dear!"

Mrs. Holmes began to collect her gloves and bags.

"Poor Flora!" Fred said, unsteadily. "She was so unhappy. Oh—how unhappy women are!"

"That's because they are fools," said Mrs. Holmes.

"Oh, yes; we're fools, all right," Frederica said, somberly. Then she told them of that ride in the fog with the dead woman: "We had done everything we knew how, and we couldn't make her breathe; so I told Howard we must take her into Laketon, so we got her into the

auto, and I held her—" There was a shuddering gasp from Mrs. Holmes; she was trying to get away, taking a backward step toward the door, then pausing, then taking another step. The horror of the thing gripped her. Weston saw her face growing gray under its powder. But still she listened, straining forward to hear distinctly.

Frederica was telling them of those terrible twenty minutes in the car, of the hour in the doctor's office, of the search for the coroner, of the drive to the undertaker's—then, suddenly, a curious thing happened: Mrs. Holmes, her face rigid, her false teeth faintly chattering, came up to her granddaughter and tapped her sharply on the shoulder.

"I could have done it, too, when I was a girl," she said, harshly; "but"—her voice broke into a whisper—"not now. I would be afraid, now." Then loudly, "I'm proud of you! *You are no fool.*"

Frederica gave her an astonished look: "Why, grandmother!" It was as if a stranger had spoken to her—but a stranger who might be a friend.

The next instant Mrs. Holmes was herself again. "It's all too horrid," she said.

"The body," Fred said, "will be brought here this morning"—she glanced at her watch; "it ought to be here now."

Mrs. Holmes instantly walked out of the room.

"The funeral will be here to-morrow. I suppose Anne will know some of her friends whom we can notify?" She sighed, and again rubbed her hand over her eyes; then looked at Arthur Weston and smiled. "Howard is all

right," she said; "don't make any mistake about *that!* Mother, I'm going up-stairs to lie down."

She went out into the hall, stopped to open the front door for her departing grandmother, then whistled to Zip, and they heard her drag her tired young feet up-stairs.

Arthur Weston's eyes were full of tears.

CHAPTER XXI

IT was extraordinary how much better Mrs. Payton was in the next few weeks. Every day she sat in the entry outside Mortimore's door, and hour after hour she and Miss Carter talked about Flora. Sometimes Mortimore was troublesome, and laughed or bellowed—and then his mother retreated; when he quieted down, she returned, and took up the story just where it had been interrupted. After each detail had been recited, and they had finally buried poor Flora, rehearsing every incident of the funeral, they would reach the question of the disposition of her possessions. Miss Carter had packed them up, and knew just how valueless they were—"except that lovely collar you gave her. Now *I* think that is too good for the Salvation Army!"

At this point the discussion was apt to become heated, Miss Carter contending that Flora's things should be sent to one of the negro schools in the South, and Mrs. Payton standing firmly for the Salvation Army. Frederica, asked to decide between them, said, briefly, "Burn 'em."

"Wouldn't that be wasteful?" Mrs. Payton objected, gently.

She was very gentle to Fred now. Her daughter's statement about being "in love" had been a very great

shock to her, not because of its "indelicacy," painful as that was, but because it awoke in her an entirely new idea: *Freddy was unhappy!* It had never occurred to Mrs. Payton that Freddy could be unhappy about anything—Freddy, who was always so strong and self-sufficient! That she should suffer, made her mother feel nearer to her than she had since Frederica was little, and had scarlet fever, and Mrs. Payton hadn't taken off her clothes for four days and four nights. So, when her daughter's drooping lip expressed what she thought of that endless gossiping about Death outside Mortimore's door, Mrs. Payton was very gentle, and only said that it would be wasteful to burn Flora's things. Then she tried to explain that she sat near Morty to cheer Miss Carter. (Freddy must not think it was on Morty's account! It would be too dreadful if now, "on top of everything else," she should be brooding over those impatient words, repented of the minute they were spoken!)

But Fred displayed no signs of brooding over anything. She took up her interest in Life just where it had paused for a moment at the touch of Love. But before she settled down into the commonplaces, of real estate, and dances, and league work, she had that Pause out with herself. . . .

She told her mother that she was going to the bungalow to put things to rights. (This was about five days after Flora's death.) "Everything is just as we left it. She hadn't even washed the dishes. And I left a few things there that I must bring home."

"Take Anne to help you."

"Anne would have a fit—she's so superstitious! No; I don't need anybody."

"I'll go with you," Mrs. Payton ventured.

Fred was frankly amused at the suggestion. "You! No; much obliged, but I don't want any one."

Mrs. Payton did not urge; back in her mind there was a dim memory of a time when she, too, had been alive—and suffered, and wanted to be alone. She said something, hesitatingly, to this effect to Arthur Weston, who dropped in that morning to know how they were getting along.

"Freddy has gone out to that awful place, to pack up," she said; "I'm sure it's very damp, and I'm terribly afraid she'll take cold. But she would go. Sometimes a person likes to be by themselves," she ended.

He was surprised at such understanding; but he only said, quietly, that he would drive out late in the afternoon and bring her home in his car. "She can have eight hours to herself," he said. (He had had some hours to himself in the last few days; hours of pacing up and down his library—saying over and over, "If Maitland isn't in love with her, why shouldn't I at least tell her that I—? No! I have no chance. But if she *should* forget him? No, no. I mustn't think of it!")

For the eight hours alone Frederica had been thirsting:

Solitude.

Lapping—lapping—lapping water.

Wind in the branches.

Shadows traveling across distant hills.

And no human face! No human sound!

So, with Zip under her arm, she took the early train to Lakeville.

From the station she walked along the sandy road where dead leaves had begun to fill the wheel-ruts, down to the huddle of boarded-up cottages on the shore. The last time she had gone over that road, how thick the fog had been! Now, the lake was a placid white shimmer against the horizon's brooding haze, and the glimmering October sunshine lay like gilt on the frosted ferns and brakes. She did not meet a single soul. Except for Zip, dashing along in front of her, or an occasional crow cawing, and flapping from one tree-top to another, there was only the wide silence of the sky. The sense of getting away from people gave her a feeling of relief that was almost physical.

When she reached Lakeville the sight of Sunrise Cottage was like a blow; she stopped short, and caught her breath. The lamp Howard had left outside the house had fallen over—perhaps a squirrel had upset it; the solferino shade was in fragments; leaves had blown up on the porch. But the flinching was only for a moment—then she turned the key in the lock.

The bungalow, with its shut-up smell, was just as they had left it, except that, in some indescribable way, it had lost the air of human habitation. Perhaps because Death had been there. In the faint draught from the open door a sheet of music slipped from the piano to the floor and some ashes blew out of the fireplace. The cottage was absolutely silent.

Frederica felt cold between her shoulders. She did not

want to go in, she did not want to have to turn her back on the stairs that led up to the vacant rooms—Flora's room! She shivered; set her lips and entered—but she left the door open behind her into the living world.

The emptiness of the house clamored in her ears. She found herself looking, with a sort of fascination, at the disorder of the chairs—which stood just as Howard had pushed them aside when they brought Flora in. On the arm of the morris chair was a brass plate heaped with cigarette-ashes. For some obscure reason those ashes seemed to her unendurable—how they had glowed, and faded, and glowed again, filling the room with warm and lazy smoke, while she and Howard— She lifted the little tray and threw the ashes, almost with violence, into the fireplace. The movement broke the spell that had held her there looking at things—at the learned books, filmed with dust, at the half-burned candles, at the withered roses on the table. Zip nosed about at that water-soaked spot on the rug, and she spoke to him sharply; then went over and closed the piano.

After that, it was easier to go out to the kitchen, though there was still a tremor at the thought of those empty rooms overhead. Spread out on the table were the cards, just as Flora had left them. In the sink was the clutter of unwashed dishes. . . . Fred drew a long breath, opened all the windows, lighted a fire in the stove, and went to work.

Of course the exertion of packing and cleaning was a relief. There was a great deal to do. So much that she felt at first that she should need another day to get

through with it. But her capability was never more marked—by noon she began to see the end. She ate her luncheon walking about, holding a sandwich in one hand and packing books with the other. She had arranged with her landlord to send a van to the cottage for the piano, and it was also to carry her things back to town; she had thought of every detail. It was the way she did all her work—drawing up leases, or talking to women's clubs, or, of late, "making things pleasant" at Payton Street. Even now, shrinking from the work that must be done up-stairs, where it was all so empty—so full of Flora!—she was efficient, methodical, thorough. She scanted nothing. Yet no amount of busyness dulled the ache of misery which had goaded her out here to be alone—but she was impatient at herself for feeling the ache.

It was so unreasonable to be miserable!

When everything was done—the kitchen tidied, books and clothing and personal odds and ends packed, even the little white curtains in the empty rooms up-stairs, all limp and stringy from the creeping October fogs, pressed and folded and put away—it was still early afternoon. But there was no train into town until five; she would give herself up to the silence.

She went out on the porch and sat down on the lowest step in the sunshine. Zip ran about, chased a squirrel, then, curling up on her skirt, went to sleep. Sometimes she rubbed his ears, sometimes stared out over the lake—

She had been refused. "I am hard hit," she admitted, and her face quivered. However, she could stand being hit! She could take her medicine, and not make faces.

Arthur Weston had said that about her, and she liked to remember it.

Suddenly her mind veered away into all sorts of unrelated things. Queer that Howard cared so much for shells. He had found that pearl in a shell; the pearl that she had thought—*oh*, what a fool she had been!—was meant for her. That old seed-pearl set of her mothers', pin and ear-rings, would make a dandy pendant. She believed she'd ask her mother for it. Except on this shell-digging business, how entirely Howard and she agreed about everything! Few men and girls were so in accord, mentally. Imagine Howard trying to talk to any of the girls of her set—even to Laura—as he talked to her! Why, Laura would be dumb when he got on the things that were worth-while. He had once said that he would rather talk to her than any girl he knew; no—it was to "any man" he knew. For a moment the old pride rose—then fell. She almost wished he *had* said to "any girl." Well; no girl—or man, either—could have done better than she did on that poster scheme. Howard would say so when she would tell him about it, and she was going to tell him; she was going to talk to him just as she had always talked—about everything on earth! She *must;* or else he would think that she was . . . hard hit; and that she simply couldn't bear! The poster scheme reminded her of some league work she had neglected in these five days of tingling emptiness, and she frowned. "Gracious! I must attend to that," she said. She did not know it, but her bruised mind was fleeing for shelter into trivialities. Suddenly she took her purse out of

her pocket, thrust a thumb and finger into the place where she kept her visiting-cards, and took out a burnt match. She looked at it for a moment with a grunt of bitter laughter; then, finding a little stick, dug a hole in the path, laid the match in, covered it, and stepped on it, hard.

"That is the end," she said.

After a while she realized that she was cold, and went back into the house and kindled a fire. She sat down on a hassock, and stretched out her hands to the blaze. The sunshine came through the uncurtained window and laid a finger on the soot on the chimney back; its faint iridescence caught her eye. Was it only Monday night that she and Howard had sat here by the fire, and he had kicked the logs together on the andirons, and the sparks had caught in the soot and spread and spread in marching rosettes? Why, it seemed years! It was then that she had—asked him.

She wasn't ashamed of it! She had proposed and been refused. "He thought it was stunning in me to do it; he said so! He feels as I do about the equality of men and women in this kind of thing, as well as everything else. Of course, he may have said so just to—to make it easier for me? If I thought *that*—"

The blood rushed into her face. She would not think that! It would be unendurable to think he had not been sincere. "He felt it was perfectly all right for me to be the one to speak. And it was!"

Of course it was. There was nothing for her to be ashamed of. She herself had once refused an offer of

marriage, and certainly the rejected suitor had not seemed to suffer any pangs of shame! He had displayed a rather mean anger: "He wanted my money, and he was hopping mad when he couldn't get it. I didn't want to get anything. I only wanted to give! So why don't I brace up? I had a right to 'give.'"

She was quite certain that she had a right, so why was she so miserable? So—ashamed.

In spite of herself she said the word. She had shied away from it, and refused to utter it, a dozen times; but at last, here, alone, she had to tell herself the truth.

She was ashamed.

It is only when Truth speaks to us, as in the cool of the day the Voice of God spoke in the Garden, that the human creature knows he is ashamed. Not to feel Shame is to be deaf to that Voice. Frederica was not deaf; but the Voice was very faint, very wandering and indirect. She could hardly hear it. It spoke first in her vague wish that Howard had said he would rather talk to her than any "girl" he knew; and then it spoke in the wonder whether a man does like to be "asked."

"If he doesn't, it's just idiotic tradition. It belongs to the days of slavery!"

But how did the tradition grow up that a woman mustn't ask a man to marry her? She tried to remember something Arthur Weston once said about men being "born hunters." Her lip drooped, angrily; "Rot!" she said; "when it comes to love, a woman has as much at stake as a man. No, she has more at stake! She has the child. Queer," she thought, "the woman is always the

one who sticks to the child." She wondered if that was because women pay such a price for children? It occurred to her, with a sense of having made a discovery, that all through nature, the mother cares for her offspring just in proportion to what it costs her to bring it into the world.

She rolled Zip over on his back and pulled his ears, her mind dwelling, with the ancient resentment of her sex, upon the unfairness of nature—for the father pays no price! "I wonder if that explains desertion? I wonder if men desert girls, after they've got them into trouble, simply because the child costs them nothing? But how the girls stick to the babies, poor things! *They* hardly ever go off on their own bat. And yet" (thus the Voice was speaking!), "the child needs a father to take care of it, as much as a mother, so the man and the woman ought to keep together. . . . But *he's* the one who goes off! It ought to be tit for tat! Women ought to do the deserting," she said, passionately; but a moment later came the cynical admission: "Men wouldn't mind being 'deserted.' They'd probably like it. They ought to be *made* to be constant. When we get the vote, we'll make laws to stop their 'deserting'!"

Then she wavered; as far as laws go, there were enough now. The fact was, men were naturally faithless! "I hate men," she said, between her set teeth. Arthur Weston was right, they were "hunters." They are constant —in pursuit. "We ought to keep them on the hot-foot, then they'd be more keen to stay with us!" In a flash came the rest of Weston's comment: "They won't bag the game, if it perches on their fists." Her face reddened

violently. She had come, head on, against a biological fact, namely, that reluctance in the woman makes for permanence in the man.

Reluctance! . . .

Her mother's tiresome talk about "cheapness" was suddenly intelligible. How foolish the word had sounded! Yet, perhaps, under its foolishness lay a primitive fact: that the welfare of the child demands a permanent relation between the father and the mother. But in proportion as she is "cheap," he is temporary, and the relationship is jeopardized!

She did not put it into words, but she realized, amazed, that woman, whether she knows it or not, acts upon this old race knowledge. For the child's sake, she tries, by every sort of lure, to hold man to permanence which she will herself acquire by the fierce welding of agony. The surest "lure" is based upon the fact that man pursues that which flees; but all the lures spring from Nature's purpose to safeguard the child by giving it the care of two instead of one. For the "child" is the most important thing in the world!

Fred was thinking hard. Sometimes she put a stick on the fire, and once she got up and paced about the room. It came over her, with a rush of surprise, that all the talk of what girls must and mustn't do, "all the drivel about 'propriety'!" was based on this same Race instinct.

She saw that for a girl to love a man, unasked, is neither ignoble nor immodest. It is divine to love—always! Such love is a jewel, worn unseen above a girl's heart; to offer it, is to take it out of its white shelter and

fling it into hands that, not having sought it, will soon let it drop between indifferent fingers. She saw how this Race instinct has gradually—and oh, so painfully, oh, so foolishly, with failure, and agony, and tragic absurdities of convention, taught women the value of the reticence of modesty.

Taught them that they must not be "cheap"!

It came to her that it was the business of women like herself—the "new" women, who are going to set Woman free!—it was their business to discard the absurdities, but keep the beauties and dignities; for beauty and dignity are "lures," too. "They *attract*. I suppose that is what Grandmother means by 'charm,'" she reflected; "she said I hadn't any." Her face suddenly scorched; to discover a temperamental deficiency made her wince; it was like discovering a physical blemish. She understood, now, what Arthur Weston meant when he "rowed" about her being in the apartment alone with Howard. She had been "cheap." She had "perched on his fist." He had had no inclination to bag the game. . . .

It was all very loose and incoherent thinking; she caught at one fact, only to find it contradicted by another fact. But in all her mental confusion one anguished wish stood fast:

"Oh, if I *only* hadn't asked him!"

In her futile shame, her head fell on her knees and she caught her breath in a sort of sob—then sat upright, listening intently: a motor! *Howard?* In spite of reason, a leap of hope made her gasp.

She rose quickly, and stood, her hand over her lips—

waiting. . . . Then she saw the car, and her heart seemed to drop in her breast; it was only Arthur Weston.

He came in, saying, cheerfully, he had heard she was packing, and had come out to bring her back to town. "We can load the tonneau with anything you want to take home," he said; "I suppose you haven't any tea for a wayfarer?" He was very matter-of-fact; he saw the tremor and heard the catch in the breath.

There was some tea, she said—but no cream; she would boil some water.

He sat down, and she waited on him, getting herself in hand, even to the extent of some pitiful little impertinences. Then, by and by, they carried her things out to the auto. "My landlord is going to send for the piano," she said; "all I have to do is to close the shutters."

He went about with her, helping her, teasing her, and scolding her because she was tired. When everything was done, and they were just leaving the house, she paused abruptly, and her hands went up to her eyes.

"Poor Flora!"

He was standing beside her, gentle and pitying, longing to draw those shaking hands down from her hidden face: "You were always good to her," he said.

"No!" she said, in a smothered voice; "no." Then, suddenly, she turned toward him and sank against his shoulder. He felt the sob that shook her from head to foot. Instinctively, his arms went about her, and he held her close to him; he was silent, but he trembled and those passionate and sensitive eyebrows twitched with pain. It was only for a moment that he felt her sob-

bing weight—then she flung her head up, her face quivering and smeared with tears. "What a liar I am! I'm not crying about Flora at all. I'm just—unhappy. That's all."

He took her hand and held it to his lips, silently.

"I'm tired," she said; "—no! no! I *won't* lie—I *won't* lie! I'm not tired. I've been a fool! That's all. A fool."

"We all have to be fools, Fred, before we can be wise."

She had drawn away from him, with a broken laugh. "You don't know anything about it! *You* don't know what it's like to be a fool!"

"Don't I? I was a very big fool myself, once. But I'm so wise now that I'm glad of all the blows my folly gave me then. I'll tell you about it, one of these days."

He told her as they drove back to town. "And," he ended, "I can see that the best thing that ever happened to me was to have Kate jilt me."

CHAPTER XXII

AFTER Fred had gone out into the wilderness, and learned her lesson; after that long day in the cottage, when her mind had emptied itself of some of its own certainties, so that deep, primitive knowledges could flow into it, she took up life again in her own way. She went to her office, she exercised Zip, she accepted every invitation that came to her; but she got thin. "Scrawny," her grandmother called it. Also, she expended a good deal of money on a bridesmaid's dress—for something had happened! Happened, curiously enough, on the very afternoon when she was studying that hard page of Nature's book, all alone, in the empty cottage by the lake. . . .

The very next morning Laura had burst into 15 Payton Street. "Swear not to tell," she said; and when Fred had sworn, the secret—glowing, wonderful! was told in two words:

"*I'm* engaged!"

Then came an ecstatic recital, ending with "I've decided on daffodil yellow for your dresses. Rather far ahead—for it isn't to be until the middle of December. But I think it's just as well to plan, don't you?"

"Of course it is," Fred agreed. (*"Oh, if I only hadn't asked him!"*)

"Billy-boy will juggle out enough money for the finest satin going, for his only daughter; but you girls can have perfectly sweet flowered voile, over yellow charmeuse. I've a corking idea for your hats." Then she looked at Fred closely. "You're not a bit surprised; I believe you knew what was going to happen!"

Fred laughed non-committally. Laura herself had been so far from knowing what was going to happen, that Howard Maitland had to fairly pound it into her that he was in love with her! He had not meant to tell her so soon. It wouldn't be decent, he thought, remembering that night in the cottage. He hadn't meant to speak for at least a month. He was going to mark time, and forget that there had ever been a minute when Fred Payton had imagined she cared about him—"for, of course, that was all it amounted to," he told himself; "imagination!" There was more modesty than truth in his phrase, yet his conviction was sincere enough—"A girl like Fred couldn't really care for *me*. I'm not up to her!"

It was characteristic of his simple soul, that he told Laura the same thing, when he blundered into the proposal that he had meant to hold back for a month. It was wrung from him by his despair at her misunderstanding his feeling about Fred. He was in full swing of haranguing her upon the wonderfulness of her cousin —"Of course; she's perfectly stunning," Laura had interrupted; "I know she's simply great. But why on earth you two don't announce your engagement I can't imagine! You make me a little tired," she said, good-naturedly, but rather obviously bored.

"Announce our *what?*"

"Engagement. Do you suppose we are all blind?"

Howard Maitland actually whitened a little under his Philippine tan. "You are mistaken, Laura," he said, quietly. "If I have given you the impression that Fred had the slightest feeling for me, I ought to be kicked."

Laura turned an indignant face toward him: "Do you mean to tell me that Fred has only been flirting with you? I don't believe it! She's not that kind."

They were in the Childses' parlor in the yellow dusk of the autumn afternoon. Laura had given her caller two cups of tea with four lumps of sugar in each cup, and Howard, between innumerable little cakes, had been telling her again of Frederica's behavior that terrible night at the camp. It was at least the third time that she had heard the grim details, and each time she had shivered and wished he would stop. To silence him, she had charged upon him for not announcing his engagement; it seemed flippant, but it would change the subject. His dismay made her forget Flora, in real bewilderment. Not engaged to Fred! Had Fred played with him?

"If Fred's been just flirting, she ought to be ashamed," Laura said, hotly; "she knew you were perfectly gone on her."

"Laura, *you* didn't suppose such a thing?"

"That you were gone on Fred? Of course I did! I knew you were crazy about her, a year ago; and so did she. Howard, I'm awfully sorry."

"Sorry—for what?"

"For you."

Howard Maitland got on his feet, and walked the length of the room, and back; he said something under his breath. Then he drew up a chair beside her and took her hand.

"I never thought of such a thing."

"What!"

"You are the only girl I ever cared two cents for."

She put her hand against her young breast, in astounded question: "*I?*"

"I should think you'd have seen it. You, and—and everybody."

"But Howard, it can't be—*me?*" she protested, faintly.

"It's been you, always. When you accuse me of being in love with—with anybody else, and say everybody thought so, you just bowl me over!" His shocked astonishment left no doubt of his sincerity.

"But Freddy," Laura began—

He broke in sharply: "Fred knows how tremendously I admire her. I've always said so, to you and to her, too. And I believe she likes me as much as she likes any of us fellows—but of course I'm not up to her, and she never flirted with me in her life! She's not the kind of girl who wants to collect scalps," he said, almost with anger. "I never thought of—caring for her. Why, I—I *couldn't* care for Fred!"

"But you were always talking about her, and—"

"Of course I talked about her! Doesn't everybody talk about her? But as for being in love with her—Laura, I tell you, you are the only girl in existence, so far as I'm concerned. I suppose you don't care anything about me."

Laura put her hands over her face, and laughed; then stretched them out to him, and the tears brimmed over. . . . "Oh, Howard, you are such a goose!"

There was a speechless moment; then he put his arms around her, kissed the fluffy hair that brushed his lips, and said, "Oh, my little darling! my little love. . . ."

After that they had to talk it all over, and there were endless explanations.

"You do believe I never thought of—anybody else?" he asked, again and again. And she said yes, she believed it, but she didn't understand it.

"Why, I was so sure you were in love with her, I used to give you chances to be together. Do you remember that afternoon you went to say good-by to her, before you went to the Philippines? I stayed up-stairs to give you a chance to ask her."

"*Laura!*"

"I did."

"How could you be so absurd?"

"Everybody thought so."

That silenced him. He was horribly ashamed. It was his fault, then, that night in the cottage? "Everybody thought so." So, naturally, Fred thought so—and she was the noblest and most generous woman in the world! "It's my fault somehow, that she spoke," he told himself, in a passion of humiliation.

That night he wrote to her. The engagement was not to "come out" for two or three weeks;—"only the family must know," Laura said; but Howard had protested: "Fred—let's tell Fred?"

"Well," Laura consented, reluctantly, "I'll go and see her to-morrow morning and make her swear not to tell."

"She can keep a secret," he said. He did not add that Fred should learn the secret before to-morrow morning. "I'm the one to break it to her," he thought. Then mentally kicked himself for saying "break it."

When he sat down at his desk that night to write to her, his face was rigid at what was before him; it was nearly dawn before the task was finished; letters—long letters, short letters, letters expressing his admiration for her, letters ignoring it, letters about Laura, about the Philippines, about Flora—were written out, torn up, flung into the waste-basket. Then came the brief, blunt truth-telling: Laura had accepted him, and he knew that she, his old pal, would wish them happiness. Of course there was a postscript: she would be their very best friend, because they both thought she was the finest woman they knew.

When the letter was addressed and sealed, he went out into the four-o'clock-in-the-morning stillness, and walked over to Payton Street to slip it into the letter-box of the sleeping house. He would not trust it to the mail; he would run no risk of Laura's arriving before the first delivery. Fred mustn't be caught off guard! Then he walked home—glanced at a little suspiciously by an officer on his somnolent beat—about as uncomfortable a young man as ever realized his own happiness in contrast to some one else's unhappiness—for, in spite of his modest disclaimer, he knew that Fred was unhappy: "How would

I feel if Laura had refused me? And, of course, Fred is harder hit than a man would be."

But, no matter how hard hit she was, thanks to that letter, the next morning, when Laura swore her to secrecy, and said that the bridesmaids' hats would be *dreams!* Fred's upper lip was smilingly stiff.

It was just after that that Mrs. Holmes began to say that her granddaughter was "scrawny."

CHAPTER XXIII

OFTEN, in those weeks before Laura's wedding, Mrs. Payton, working out a puzzle, or playing Canfield on the big rosewood table in the sitting-room, would stop and stare straight before her, with unseeing eyes. . . . Like a needle working its way through nerveless flesh toward some vital spot, a new emotion, *anger*, was penetrating the routine of her meaningless days.

Laura had cut Freddy out!

Love for Morty, the dam love, which is the habit of the body and has nothing to do with the intellect, was pushed aside by the new idea: Freddy was suffering because Laura had stolen her lover.

"It was despicable in her!" Mrs. Payton said to herself—and the needle-point of anger came a little nearer to that sleeping nerve of maternity, which, when it was reached, would, in a pang of exquisite pain, make her love Fred as she had never loved anything in her life.

Mrs. Payton put a black nine on a red eight; saw her mistake, frowned, and put out a mechanical hand to correct it. "I wonder if she would drink a glass of malted milk at night, if I fixed it for her?" she thought; and uncovered an ace. "Laura hasn't half her brains!" she said, and put the card in the ace row; "how could Mr. Maitland

see anything to her—except looks? She *is* pretty. But Freddy is worth a dozen of her, and he was head over ears in love with her! Yes; Laura simply took him from her! I shall never feel the same to Laura again;—and I suppose Bessie and William expect me to give her a handsome wedding-present." She wondered, with vague malice, whether there wasn't something in the house—the old wonder of the reluctant giver of gifts!—that she could send Laura? Some family silver; the epergne, for instance, three silver squirrels holding a platter on their heads.

The question of the wedding-present was so irritating to her, that in the afternoon, when Freddy came in, rather listlessly (this was in November—a month before the wedding), Mrs. Payton referred the matter to her—shifting her angry pain to Freddy's galled young shoulders. There was no wincing.

"What shall we give Laura?"

"Something bully! I was talking to her about it today, and asked her what she wanted. I think a rug is the thing."

"I wonder if some of the Payton silver—" Mrs. Payton began—but Fred threw up horrified hands.

"No! No second-hand goods! And it's got to be something first rate, too; (if it takes my last dollar!)" she added, under her breath.

The rug did not take quite the last dollar, but it took more than she could afford, and Laura was perfectly delighted with it. Howard, standing on it, his hands in his pockets, dug an appreciative heel into its silky nap, and

made his usual comment: "It's bully! Fred's taste is great!"

Sometimes, looking back on the night that Flora died, Howard wondered if it all (except the poor soul's suicide) was not a dream? For Fred *was* so "bully"! . . . Entering into all Laura's ecstasies and anxieties; crazy to know who would make the wedding-dress; perfectly wild over Howard's present to his bride; frantic because it was too early to get jonquils for the rope down each side of the aisle. . . . That astounding moment in the bungalow must have been, Howard told himself, a dream! Two dreams—his and Fred's, for she evidently cared no more for him than for old Weston.

So the days passed (Howard thought they never would pass!) and the Day drew near. When it came, Frederica Payton's head was as high as any of the other young heads. There were eight of them, in most marvelous and expensive yellow hats, to follow the shimmering Laura up the aisle. At the reception afterward, Frederica, in her vivid joyousness almost—so her Uncle William said—"took the shine off the bride! Remember Shakespeare (as *you'd* say)—

> "Bring in our daughter
> Clothed like a bride . . .
> See, where she comes,
> Appareled like the spring,"—

Mr. Childs quoted, puffing happily—"but that frock you've got on is spring-like, too—all yellow and white, like buttercups and daisies."

"I'm rather stuck on it, myself," Fred said, complacently; she was standing beside Arthur Weston, eating ice-cream with appetite.

"Well," her uncle said, chuckling, "I may tell you in confidence— Hey, Howard!" he interrupted himself, clutching at the passing bridegroom, "I was just telling Freddy that I was very much astonished when I learned that you were to be my son-in-law. I thought you were making up to her!"

"To *me?*" said Fred, incredulously; "he never knew I existed when Laura was around!"

"I'm just looking for Laura now," Howard said, with a gasp; "she's deserted me!" he complained, laughing—and escaped.

"Oh," Mr. Childs said, clapping his niece on the shoulder so heartily that her ice-cream spilled over, "of course I know, now, that it's always been Laura!"

"Yes," Fred agreed, gaily, "he's been dead set for Lolly for the last two years."

So she got through with the Day. . . . When she reached home, and up in her own room took off the yellow hat, she took off that gallant smile, too; she had worn it until the muscles about her lips were stiff. She was profoundly fatigued; too fatigued to feel anything but relief that the wedding was over. Even the old ache of wishing she "hadn't told him" was numbed. It was part of the generosity of her honest, sore young heart, that she felt a faint satisfaction in the fact that, anyhow, *he* was happy; as for Laura—"how mean I am to—dislike her! It wasn't her fault, and she's just the same old Lolly. I

won't dislike her! I'll love her, just as I've always loved her." When she went down to dinner that night she put the smile on again, and was very airy and smart in her comments to Mrs. Payton upon the Childs family, and the company in general.

"Laura was perfectly sweet! But Aunt Bessie is too fat to wear such tight clothes. Why do the fat fifties always wear tight clothes? . . . Grandmother wasn't shy on powder, was she? . . . Billy-boy would talk about Bacon at his own funeral! . . . How many kinds of a fool do you suppose that old hag, Maria Spencer, is? . . . I—I guess I'll go to bed. I was an idiot to eat ice-cream; it always makes my head ache."

Perhaps her head ached too badly for sleep. At any rate, hours later, when 15 Payton Street had sunk into midnight darkness, she heard a board creak under a careful step in the hall, and sat up in bed, saying, sharply, "Who's that?"

"It's I, dear. Don't be frightened." Mrs. Payton came feeling her way across the room to Fred's bedside.

"Is anything the matter? Is Mortimore—"

"No, no; nothing! Only, Freddy, my darling, I—I just want to tell you something." She sat down on the edge of the bed, and Frederica heard her draw in her breath in a sob.

"Mother! Are you ill?"

"No—no. But Freddy, I—I didn't mean it when I said that about Mortimore."

"Said what?" Fred said, frowning with anxiety; "here, let me light the gas!"

"No, don't!" Mrs. Payton put a restraining hand on her daughter's shoulder; "about—about loving him best. I don't, dear; truly I don't."

"But, Mother!"—Fred put her arms about the soft, loose figure that tumbled into sobs against her—"I didn't know you said it, and if you did, I don't mind it in the least!" She felt her mother's tears on her cheek, and gathered her up against her breast; "Why, Mother! It's all right—really it is. It's all right to love him best—"

"But I don't—I *don't!* I love you best."

"Why," Fred soothed her, "I didn't even remember you'd said it. You only told me I was like Father—and that did me good."

"No! I never said you were! And it isn't so. You're *not*—not a bit! My little Freddy!"

Frederica smiled grimly in the darkness, and she let the statement pass; for suddenly something surged up in her breast; something she had never felt in her life; something that was actual pain; she had no name for it, but it made the tears sting in her eyes. "There, dear, there!" she comforted her cowering mother; . . . "I understand," she said, brokenly; "I understand!"

It is a wonderful moment, this moment of "understanding." It made Fred draw the foolish gray head down on her young breast, and caress and comfort it, as years ago her own little head had been caressed and kissed. They were both "mothers" at that moment.

So Laura's wedding-day was lived through. And by and by the weeks that followed were lived through. And

then the months pushed in between Fred and that night at the camp. She never spoke of Howard and Laura.

"I wonder if she's got over it," Mrs. Payton speculated, wistfully. She was glad, for her part, that the bride and bridegroom had gone abroad, and she did not have to see them—"especially Laura!" she used to say to herself, bitterly. If Fred was bitter, she didn't show it; she was absorbed in league work, and a really growing real-estate business; it was all she could do to find time to listen when her mother talked, and talked, and talked—or people, or puzzles, or parlor-maids! But how could she fail to listen —no matter how dull and foolish the talk was—remembering that midnight of pity?

"Freddy is getting very companionable," Mrs. Payton told Arthur Weston. He had come upon Fred bending over a puzzle spread out on the big table in the sitting-room, and trying to fit one wriggly piece of blue after another into a maliciously large expanse of uncharted sky; she had been obviously relieved at the chance to shift the entertainment of Mrs. Payton to his shoulders.

"I've got to go to a league meeting," she excused herself. When she had gone and he was standing with his back to the fire, sipping his tea and talking pleasantly of the weather, or the barber's children, or poor Flora's tendency to put too much starch in the table linen (raising his voice, in a matter-of-fact way, when there was a noise behind the door of the other room), he agreed warmly with Mrs. Payton's tribute to her daughter: "Freddy is getting companionable."

"Indeed she is!" he said, and added that she was remark-

ably clever about puzzles—which pleased Mrs. Payton very much. This new sense of sympathy which held Fred down to picture puzzles, made her try to avoid topics on which she knew she and her mother could not agree. As the winter went on, the especial topic to be avoided was a strike among the rubber workers. Fred was passionately for the strikers, who were all girls. She went constantly to Hazelton, where the factory was, to give what help she could to the union women, and to admonish them that the way to cure industrial conditions, which all fair-minded people admitted were frightful, was by the ballot.

"Get the man's ballot, and you'll get the man's wages!" was her slogan—and she was quite fierce with her man of business when he pointed out the economic fallacy of her words.

"The kingdom of God cometh not by the ballot," he admonished her.

"I feel as if I were going to Sunday-school!"

"A little Sunday-school wouldn't hurt you. It never seems to strike you," he ruminated, "that if 'laws,' which you are so anxious to have a hand in making, could settle supply and demand, the men, poor creatures, would have feathered their own nests a little better."

To which Miss Payton replied, concisely, "Rot!"—and continued to tell the strikers that suffrage was a cure-all.

It was in March that one of the morning papers announced, with snobbish detail, that Miss Freddy Payton, a "young society girl," had "patrolled" to keep off scabs. That evening, at dinner, Mrs. Payton, mortified to death

at the notoriety, and encouraged by Arthur Weston's presence at the table, ventured into controversy:

"When I was a young lady—" she began, and instantly Frederica's lance was in rest! She did not mean to be cruel—but she couldn't help being smart. Her mother's injured sense of propriety was batted back to her across the dinner-table, like a shuttlecock from a resounding battledore.

"You may say what you like," Mrs. Payton said, obstinately, "but I don't believe it would make a bit of difference to give those perfectly uneducated Italian girls a vote. It hasn't," she ended, with one of those flashes of shrewdness so characteristic of dull women, "made any difference in the men's wages. And, anyhow, I don't understand why you like to mix yourself up with all sorts of persons."

"The Founder of your religion mixed Himself with all sorts of persons," Frederica said, wickedly; "but, of course, He would not be in society to-day."

"That is a very irreverent thing to say," Mrs. Payton said, stiffly.

("Now, why," Mr. Weston pondered, "why doesn't the atrocious taste of that sort of talk cure me? Because," he answered himself, "it 'amuses' me! Oh, Cousin Eliza, you are a wise old woman!")

As for Frederica, she was not conscious that her lack of taste was amusing; but she knew it was unkind, and felt the instant stab of remorse. ("I'm just like Father!" she groaned to herself); then with resolution she began to talk about puzzles; she said she thought the reason her

mother couldn't work out that six-hundred-piece one was because the people who made it had omitted some pieces, and it never could be got out.

"Try it a few days longer," Fred said, "and then, if you want me to, I'll write to the people who manufactured it and ask them about it. Arthur Weston! I am going to stand by those girls in Hazelton until they win out!"

"When they do, their work will stop," he prophesied, mildly. "The factory hasn't paid a dividend for three years, and if wages go up, it will shut up. I happen to know how they stand."

"Laura's back," Fred said, abruptly; "they got home yesterday. I asked her if she'd walk in the parade, and she said, 'Howard wouldn't like it!' That sort of thing makes me tired."

CHAPTER XXIV

THE invitation to walk in the parade had not been given easily. Fred had forced herself to ask Laura, for very shame at the ache of resentment which neither reason, nor her old habit of affection for her cousin, could conquer. Laura's refusal gave her a sort of angry satisfaction. "*Of course!* What could you expect? She's a sweet little thing, but she has no mind to speak of. Poor Howard! She must bore him to death." As for Howard's not liking parades,—well, that was queer. He never had quite realized their value; probably because he hadn't really thought about them. She would talk it over with him sometime, and make him understand. She was not in the least annoyed with Howard, but it was all she could do to hide her contempt for Laura; "Why *do* women grovel so before men? It makes me perfectly sick!" Even when Laura, with the old, puppy-like devotion, offered, one morning, to go with her to Hazelton where Fred was to address the strikers, it was not easy to be cordial.

"I'll tag around after you, and clap," Laura said.

"Howard willing?" Fred said, sarcastically.

Laura laughed: "I haven't asked him. He's in Cincinnati. Won't be home until this afternoon."

"I suppose you wouldn't go if he wasn't?"

"I suppose I wouldn't," Laura said, simply.

Fred's lip drooped. But she only said, good-naturedly, "Come along!" They went to Hazelton by trolley, Fred having vetoed Laura's limousine: "It's too much 'Lady Bountiful.' Your gasolene for a week would pay a girl's board for a month."

In the long ride, spinning and jouncing through the countryside until they reached the squalid outskirts of the little town, Frederica listened to Laura's talk of Europe—and Howard. Of Paris frocks—and Howard. Of the voyage home—and Howard.

"I won't be horrid, I *won't!* I love her just exactly the same—" Fred was saying to herself, staring out of the window at the flying landscape, at the woods where the leafless trees were showing the haze of swelling buds, at the snow, melting in the frozen furrows. "Yes. . . ." "No. . . ." "Really?" she would say, when sometimes Laura's chatter paused. ("Oh, how bored Howard must be by this sort of thing!" she thought. She couldn't help remembering how differently she had talked to Howard—the big things, the real things! "Poor old Howard!") Once there was quite a long pause, and Fred stopped watching the racing landscape and looked at Laura. It was then that Laura softly told her a piece of news:

"Of course, Howard's awfully pleased. He wants a girl, but I want a boy."

Frederica was silent for a moment: then, very gentle and tender, "I'm awfully glad," she said, and squeezed Laura's hand.

Then the chatter began again, and Fred looked out of

the window at the snow melting on slopes that faced the sun.

The hall in Hazelton where the strikers were awaiting Frederica was terribly hot and stuffy, and packed with women crowding so closely about the melon-shaped iron stove that the air was stifling with the smell of scorching clothes. It occurred to Laura, opening a window surreptitiously, that the girls were here as much for the sake of the glowing stove as for the chance to hear Fred. She watched her cousin with shrinking admiration. What she said did not particularly interest her, but Frederica's intimacy with the girls made her wonder. "She *touches* them!" Laura thought, with a quiver of disgust.

When Fred had made her speech—which Laura vociferously applauded—they all trooped out into the street, but paused while Frederica (Laura skulking behind her) stood in the doorway for a further harangue. Unfortunately—because the knot of listening girls obstructed the sidewalk—a police officer, shoving them out of the way, happened to show some rudeness to a little Italian, who, in return, jabbering shrilly, struck at the man's patient and restraining arm, which caused him to gather her two delicate wrists in one big, vise-like hand, and hold her, a little, kicking, struggling creature, who made about as much impression on his large blue bulk as a sparrow might make upon a locomotive.

"There, now, keep quiet, sissy," he said, wearily.

But Catalina kicked harder than ever, and the officer shook her, gently. It was at that moment that Fred's eye fell upon him.

"I'll stop that!" she said, between shut teeth.

"Oh, Fred, don't do anything," Laura entreated,—but Fred was at the man's side.

Her anger disconcerted him. "It's against the law to obstruct the sidewalk," he explained.

"I had no hand in making the law, and therefore I shall not obey it!"

"Better can that talk, and keep it for the Court," said the man, beginning to get red in the face. To which Frederica retorted by telling him her opinion of men in general and policemen in particular.

A man can stand kicks from little feet, but "lip"—after a certain point of forbearance has been reached, is another matter. Fred punctuated her remonstrances by putting an abrupt hand on his arm, and instantly there was an unseemly scuffle, in which Laura, running out from the shelter of the doorway, tried to draw Fred away. The result was that before they really knew what had happened, the little Italian, Miss Frederica Payton, and Mrs. Howard Maitland found themselves in a patrol-wagon rumbling and jouncing along over the icy Belgian blocks, a taciturn man in a blue coat sitting in the doorway of the van to prevent any possible leap to liberty.

The whole thing was so sudden that the cousins were perfectly bewildered. Even as they were being hustled into the wagon, a crowd had gathered, springing up, apparently, out of the ground. There had been a sea of faces —good natured, amused, unconcerned faces; a medley of voices, jeering and hooting, or raucously sympathetic; a vision of the striking girls—for whose cause they were

there!—forsaking them, melting away, fleeing around corners and up side-streets; then, the jolting along through the noon emptiness of the streets, toward the station-house.

Frederica, getting her breath, after the suddenness of it all, grew very much excited. She scented the fray—the contest between man-made laws and unconsulted woman! It occurred to her—though Laura said, in despairing tones, "Oh, Fred, *please* don't"—to fling some suffrage literature into the street over the head of the officer; she did it until he told her to "set still, you!" At which Catalina, hearing her defender reproved, kicked him, causing him to turn around and grab her ankle; he held it in one great paw, and whistled, absently.

Fred was furious. "Don't touch that girl's ankle!" she said.

"Shut up," he replied, calmly; and, oblivious of both of them, still holding Catalina's little kicking feet, he began to talk over his shoulder to the driver of the van about the price of cucumbers. "Here, you!" he interrupted himself—"stop biting, sissy! Gee! this chippy has teeth—" and he poked Catalina, playfully, with his club. Frederica whitened with rage, but Catalina lapsed suddenly into such abject fright that when they reached their destination she had to be lifted out of the wagon, and pushed—not too gently—up the steps into the station-house. Laura, who got out next, was shaking so that the officer put a friendly hand under her elbow to assist her. Frederica followed the other two, her head high with anger and interest.

In the station-house, the receiving-room, with its one dirt-incrusted window, was dark, even at one o'clock—perhaps because, shoulder-high on the long-unwashed paint, was a dado of grime left by innumerable cringing backs. There was one back against it now; a drunken man, with wabbling head and glassy, half-shut eyes, was whining and sobbing, and trying to keep on his legs. When the sergeant asked his name, he answered by a hiccough which the officer, as indifferent and efficient as a cog in some slowly revolving and crushing wheel, translated into "Thomas Coney." "Come, stop crying; be a perfect gentleman, Tommy, be a perfect gentleman!" he said, yawning. And, curiously enough, Tommy straightened up and swallowed his sobs.

"Look at him!" Fred whispered to Laura; "he's getting hold of himself! I suppose that's his idea of a perfect gentleman."

Laura, rigid with misery, made no answer. When Thomas had been disposed of—watched by Frederica's intent eyes—she and Laura, whose knees were plainly shaking, and Catalina, who was sobbing and calling upon God, lined up in front of the sergeant's desk. Frederica answered the usual questions with brief directness; her attitude toward the big, bored officer was distinctly friendly and confidential; as he closed the blotter, she began to tell him that she had been urging the girls to demand the bal— Before she could finish the word, she found herself, to her angry amazement, being moved along toward the corridor.

"But—stop! I have not finished. And I want to telephone, and—"

"What number?"

Both girls spoke at once, Frederica giving Mr. Weston's number, and Laura, stammering with apprehension that Howard might not go directly home from the train, naming her own house. "Ask Mr. Weston to hunt Howard up," she implored her cousin. The telephoning was fruitless, as neither gentleman could be found.

"You can try 'em again over at the House of Detention," the man said, not unkindly. "Move on! Move on!"

They moved on, in spite of themselves, assisted by the impersonal pressure of an officer's hand on Fred's shoulder —Laura shivering all over, Fred's face red with displeasure at the affront of not being listened to, Catalina perfectly happy and inclined to giggle.

"You'll make Mr. Weston find Howard?" Laura said, in a frantic whisper, as they walked across the courtyard to the little jail back of the station-house. "Oh, I was going to meet him,—and I am *here!*"

Fred shrugged her shoulders: "Why did you come, if you mind it so? (Married women are awfully poor sports," she thought.)

"Do you think I'd funk and leave you?" Laura retorted; and Fred's face softened.

"Howard will be so upset—" Laura said, quivering.

"Nonsense! He'll see the fun of it," Fred assured her. In matters of this kind, she understood Howard better than little Lolly ever could. . . .

Her face was glowing with excitement! This meant something to the Cause! An old phrase ran through her mind, "The blood of the martyrs is the seed,"—"I tell

you what, Laura," she said, under her breath, "this ridiculous business is the seed of a big thing; it has given me a great idea: *let women refuse to obey the laws, until they are allowed to make them!*"

"This way," said the officer, and herded them into the receiving-room of the House of Detention. The next few minutes stung even Fred's aplomb—they were searched! The indignity of hands passing down her figure—hands not rough, not unkind, not insulting, merely mechanical,—made her unreasonably, but quite furiously, angry. Laura was a little shocked, but her dignity was simple and unshaken. Catalina, her dirty, streaky face puffed with crying, laughed loudly with amusement.

"This is abominable!" Fred said, her voice shaking. The matron, making notes on a pad, paid no attention to the protest. It was all in the day's work—human wreckage washed up out of the gutter, rose in this bleak, stone-lined room every day; rose, flooded into the surrounding cells, where it vociferated, wept, pleaded, stood rigid with fury and shame, or else collapsed into sodden slumber. Then, by and by, it ebbed away. And the next day, and the next, the same drift and ruin of humanity flooded in and drifted out.

After further telephoning had been promised by the matron, the three girls were placed in a cell. Catalina at once flung herself full length on the bench that ran along two sides of it; Fred sat down and took out her note-book. "I mustn't forget one incident," she told herself. The experience had penetrated below the theatrical consciousness of martyrdom, and roused a primitive anger,

not for herself, or the other two (of whom, to tell the truth, she thought very little), but against the wastefulness of a system which permitted this wreckage to sweep in and sweep out—unchecked, unchanged, over and over. She saw, as she had never seen before, the righteousness of woman's demand that she should have a hand in the making and the administering of Law. She was impressed, not so much by the injustice of leaving the punishment of women to men, as by the irrationality of it.

"There ought to have been a woman in that station-house," she said; "and there ought to be women police officers and judges. Just wait till we get the vote, Laura —*we'll* stop this idiocy! That's what it is: idiocy, not justice."

Laura was not concerned about terms; she stood, tense and trembling, gripping the iron bars of the door. "Howard will be so upset, and Father will be dreadfully angry!"

"Oh, yes," Fred agreed, carelessly, "Uncle William will have a fit, of course. But I'll bet on Howard! Mother will almost die of it, I'm afraid," she said, her face sobering; "I'm sorry about that. But, of course, Laura, that's the penalty of progress. We—you and I and Howard—are moving the world, and the old people have got to get out of the way or get run over!"

Laura was silent.

"The thing that hits me hardest," said Frederica, "is the way women won't stand together. Every one of those girls took to their heels."

"Oh, *when* will Howard come?" said Laura, with a sobbing breath. She was not sorry she had stood by Fred

when all the rest of them "took to their heels," only—"I'll die if he doesn't come soon!" she thought, shaking very much. Once she glanced over her shoulder at Frederica, who was straining her eyes (the cell was lighted only from the hall) over her note-book, and she felt a faint thrill of admiration. Imagine, making notes at such a moment!

The afternoon passed; hours—hours—hours.

"Oh, when will somebody come?" Laura said, in a whisper. Frederica had put up her note-book, and seemed absorbed in thought. Catalina was asleep.

There came a sound of voices in the outer court, and again Laura clutched at the iron bars. (She had been at the grating ever since the lock was turned upon them.)

"It's Howard!"

Even Fred was moved to stand up and peer out into the whitewashed corridor—then both girls shrank back; a drunken negress was being pulled along over the flagstones of the passage to the receiving-room; a few minutes later, she was pulled back again, and they heard the clang of a cell door; then yells, then evidently sickness; then cries upon God and the devil, and a torrent of unspeakably vile invective. Even Fred quailed before it, and Laura clung to her in such a paroxysm of fear that they neither of them heard the hurrying feet outside on the flagging—then the lock was flung out, and Howard caught his wife in his arms.

"I just got word," he said, hoarsely; "Weston caught me at the club. My darling!"

The tears were in his eyes and his face was as white as

Laura's. Behind him, Arthur Weston looked grimly over his head at Frederica.

"I had to chase him all around town," he said, "or we'd have been here before. And it's taken time to bail you out."

"I'm sorry to have bothered you," Fred said; "but it's been an awfully valuable experience to Laura and me. *I* wouldn't have missed it for anything!"

The matron, faintly interested, was standing by to see the end of it. "Them swells will learn something," she whispered, to her assistant; "I guess that thin one ain't bad. I thought she was. Well, good-by, ma'am," she said, listlessly; and went back to work on a piece of dingy embroidery until the next dumping of human rubbish should claim her attention.

Out in the courtyard Frederica made a little delay. Where was Catalina to go? What was she to do? "Out on bail? Does that mean she's got to come back here again?"

"It means that she's got to report at the municipal criminal court," Mr. Weston instructed her; "and so have you and Laura, unless I can patch things up."

"Good!" Fred said, eagerly, "I wanted to know the end of this silly business!"

She got into the limousine, where Laura, still very white, had been placed by Howard, who put an unabashed arm about her. His impatience at Fred's delay was obvious.

"Mr. Weston! for the Lord's sake, shut her up!" he said, angrily.

Frederica, sitting down beside him, gave him an aston-

ished look. "It was I who was talking, not Catalina," she explained; "I was telling her what to do. Of course I couldn't go away and leave her to shift for herself. Howard, this has been a great experience!"

Howard's jaw set: "Laura, dear," he whispered, "it's all right. Don't shake so, Kitty! It's all right. Mr. Weston will fix it up so you needn't go to court."

"You see," Fred began, volubly, "it all happened because of the policeman's rudeness to that poor little Catalina; Laura and I had to protect her, and—"

"Look here"—Howard turned a fierce face upon her—"you can make a fool of yourself, all you want to, but I'll thank you not to drag my wife into your damned nonsense!"

Frederica stared at him, open-mouthed.

"Maitland," the other man said, gravely, "I am sure you will apologize for that."

Howard's hand clenched over his little Laura's; he swallowed, and set his teeth. "If I have been rude, I apologize. But the fact remains; Fred ought not to have dragged Laura into any such disgusting and indecent business!"

"Oh, Howard!" Laura protested; "she didn't. I did it myself. It wasn't Fred's fault."

Frederica was silent, but Weston saw her face fall into lines of haggard amazement. As they went spinning along back to town, Howard gave himself up to whispering to Laura. Arthur Weston asked one or two questions, and Frederica told him, briefly, just what had caused the disturbance that ended in the "interesting experience." For the most part no one spoke.

At the Maitland house, Howard almost lifted his little wife out of the car; he was quivering with pain at her pain—at the thought that her ears had heard the moans of Life, that her eyes had seen its filth and horror; he was so angry at Frederica that he could not trust himself even to look at her. Of course he made no farewells. He closed the door of the limousine with a bang, and said, through the open window:

"Mr. Weston, do anything, *anything*! so that Laura won't be dragged into it. Any amount of money, of course! And the newspapers—good Lord! Can we fix them?"

"I'll see what can be done," Weston said; and the car spun away.

Frederica turned a bewildered face upon him. She stammered a little:

"He didn't"—her voice fell to an astonished whisper—"*understand.*"

They scarcely spoke until they reached the Payton house; it was dusk when they went up the steps together and rung the front-door bell. ("I am coming in to explain things to your mother," he said, quietly.) But as they stood waiting for the door to be opened, Frederica, looking at him with miserable eyes, made a gesture of finality.

"*I never knew him,*" she said.

As they heard the feet of the parlor-maid coming through the hall, she gripped his arm with her trembling hand:

"Arthur," she said, in a whisper; "just think! I asked—I asked him to marry me. And this is what he is!"

CHAPTER XXV

THE whole connection seethed! The notoriety of Flora's death was nothing compared with this notoriety. The police court! The newspapers! The gossip of Mrs. Childs's Bridge Club! And, on top of everything else, the shock to Laura.

"You see," Mrs. Payton explained to her daughter, "she's going to have a baby, and—"

"I know," Fred said, soberly; "she told me. Of course I wouldn't have let her go, if I'd known there was going to be rough-house."

"It's absurd to blame you," her mother said. "As I told your Aunt Bessie, 'It's absurd to blame Freddy!'"

"I don't mind being blamed. I oughtn't to have taken her, anyhow. She doesn't really care for the things I care for. She's entirely under Howard's thumb, poor dear!"

Mr. William Childs was almost sick with anger, and Mrs. Childs, with her calm interest in other people's troubles, agreed with Miss Mary Graham, who said that, of course, Miss Freddy meant well; but sometimes the brain defect didn't show at once, as it did in her brother. "It comes on when they are about twenty-five," said Miss Mary.

Mrs. Childs said that was the most charitable way to

look at it, and—amiably ready to tell anything to anybody—repeated the charitable opinion to Mrs. Payton.

"What did the older one say?" Fred's mother asked, distractedly.

Mrs. Childs hesitated: "Nothing very sensible; indeed, I don't know just what she meant. Something out of the Bible—that they said Christ had a devil, too. Quite profane, I thought."

"Fred isn't a devil!" Mrs. Payton said, angrily, her maternal claws ready to scratch the "older one," whose protection of Frederica was understood only by Arthur Weston, who loved her for it, but warned her that unless Bacon was the author of the phrase she had quoted it would not soothe the Childs family.

Certainly it did not soothe Bobby and Payton, who told their respective wives that Freddy ought to be shut up! "Allendale is the place for her," Bob said, mentioning a well-known insane-asylum. They told their brother-in-law that Laura ought to be ashamed of herself—which led to an in-law coolness that never quite thawed out.

"Of course I don't approve of it any more than you do," Howard said. "If I'd been at home, Laura wouldn't have gone with Fred. Trouble is, she's so sweet-tempered she does whatever anybody wants—and Fred insisted, you know. And when Laura was there she felt she had to stand by Fred—"

"Stand by your grandmother!" Payton Childs retorted. "If Fred was my sister, I'd stand by her—with a whip!"

"Well, there'll be no more speechifying in *ours*," Howard said, grimly. "But I won't have Laura blamed. What

she did, she did out of loyalty to Fred. When it comes to standing by, Laura is as decent as a man!"

Miss Spencer was of the opinion that Mrs. Payton had better take the girl to Europe—"under another name, perhaps; then she can't disgrace you. After all, Ellen, I believe she's just like Mortimore—only she doesn't jibber!"

"*Miss Spencer!*"

"I mean that though she has intellect, she—"

"Morty has intellect! Doctor Davis always said the intellect was there, but it was veiled!"

"Fred had better veil something," Miss Spencer said, dryly. "Her face, for instance, when she goes to jail."

"It wasn't a jail," Mrs. Payton protested, whimperingly.

Mrs. Holmes had her opinion, too; all Fred's didos, she said, were due to the fact that Mrs. Payton had not brought her up properly. She said this just as she was leaving the parlor, teetering along on her high-heeled shoes; then her voice suddenly roughened; she turned and glared at her daughter through her white veil.

"The amount of it is," she said, "Fred is worth all the rest of us put together! *That's* why we are so provoked at her. We know we're on the shelf, and useless old fools, every one of us! Especially William Childs."

Mrs. Payton was so astounded that she let her mother go out to her carriage unattended. But the words were a comfort to her, for, poor woman, she was struck from every side.

As for Fred, she listened listlessly to the jangle of criti-

cism, looking at her critics with curious eyes. How silly they all were! So long as the experience of being arrested had not injured Laura, what difference did it make? With her conception of the values of life, the momentary unpleasantness of newspaper notoriety was not worth thinking of. Fred was very listless now. Something had touched the garment of life, and energy and hope had gone out of it.

She ceased to be young.

The rebuff of unaccepted love she had faced gallantly; its accompanying knowledge of shame and pity and sympathy, had only steadied her; even her own irrationality in disliking Laura (she had recognized with chagrin that dislike was irrational, and she hated, she told herself, to be an idiot!)—all these emotional experiences had merely deepened and humanized her. But the discovery that the Howard Maitland she thought she knew, had never lived, was a staggering blow. The other Howard—the real Howard—honest, sweet-hearted, simple, who had found her conversation no end amusing and interesting, who had been a patient receptacle for her opinions and an amiable echo of her volubility, who had swallowed many yawns out of kindness as well as courtesy—the Howard beneath whose charm of good manners lurked the primitive fierceness of the male who protects his woman at any cost, *that* Howard had never made the slightest appeal to her. The jar of stepping down from the ideal man to the real man racked her, body and soul. The old pain of not being loved had ceased as suddenly as a pulled tooth ceases to ache. The new pain was only a sense of nothingness.

But, curiously enough, it was then that the old affection for Laura began to flow back. "Not that I get much out of her," she thought, dully; "dear little Lolly! She hasn't an idea beyond—him. She's a perfect slave to him. Well! I'm glad I'm a free woman! But she's a dear little thing." The soreness had all gone; she loved Lolly again—as one loves a kitten. She used to go to see her, and look at the baby clothes, and speculate as to whether it would be a girl or a boy. The softness, and silliness, and sweetness of it all was to her tired mind what cushions are to a tired body.

When the baby was born, early in September, the last barrier between the cousins was swept away—but Fred still made a point of not going to Laura's house at an hour when she was likely to find Howard at home. Laura's husband was an entire stranger to her. When, by accident, she did meet him, she used to say to herself, wonderingly, "How *could* I—?"

All summer Frederica went regularly to her office. "But business isn't what you'd call booming," she told Arthur Weston. In the blind fumbling about of her stunned mind to discover a reality, he was the one person to whom she turned. His calls at 15 Payton Street, whenever Fred was in town, stirred even Mrs. Payton to speculation—although it was Miss Carter who put the idea into her head:

"He always comes when Miss Freddy is here; *I* think he's taken with her."

"I wish I could think so! There is nothing I should like

better," said Mrs. Payton, sighing. But the mere hope of such a thing roused her to ask Mr. Weston to dinner whenever she knew that Fred was coming home for the night. Miss Graham, getting wind of those dinners, gave him, one day, a cousinly thrust in the ribs:

"Tortoise! I do really believe you have some sense, after all!"

"I have sense enough to know that the race is off for the tortoise, when the hare decides not to run," he said, dryly; "but that's no reason why I shouldn't dine with Mrs. Payton."

Miss Eliza was spending the summer at The Laurels, and she had Freddy on her mind. She went over to Lakeville to see her several times, and always, with elaborate carelessness, said something in Arthur Weston's favor. But she had to admit that Fred was blind to the pursuit of the faithful tortoise.

"I love the child," she told her sister; "but, I declare, I could spank her! Just think what a husband dear Arthur would make!"

"What kind of a wife would she make?" Miss Mary retorted. "I don't think she would insure any man's happiness."

"The pitiful thing about her is that she has aged so," said Miss Graham.

That sense of lost youth touched her so much that she was quite out of patience with dear Arthur. "Haven't you any heart?" she scolded. "The girl is unhappy! Carry her off, and make her happy."

"I'm too old to turn kidnapper," he defended himself.

"She is brooding over something," Miss Eliza said; "it *can't* be because that foolish young man took her cousin when he could have got her? She has too much backbone for that!"

Mr. Weston agreed that Fred was not lacking backbone, but he could not deny the brooding. So it came about that the dear old matchmaker was moved, one day, to go to Sunrise Cottage and put her finger in the pie. After she had drunk a cup of tea, and listened for half an hour to Fred's ideas as to how Laura should bring up the baby, and the "slavery of mothers"—"Lolly hasn't time to read a line!" Fred said;—Miss Eliza suddenly touched her on the shoulder:

"My dear," she said, "you've got to live, whether you like it or not. Make the best of it!"

Fred gave a gasp of astonishment; then she said, in a low voice, "How did you know I didn't like living?"

"Because when I didn't, I was just as careless about my back hair as you are."

Involuntarily Fred put her hand up to her head. "Is it untidy?"

"It's indifferent. And when you think how fond Arthur is of you, it's very selfish in you not to look as pretty as you can."

She went away greatly pleased with herself. "It will touch her vanity to think he likes her to look pretty; and when a girl tries to look pretty for a man, the next step is to fall in love with him."

Alas! Fred's vanity was not in the slightest degree flattered. But her pride had felt the roweling of the spur

of Truth. She must brace up—because she had got to live! The words were like a trumpet. "I've got to live —*whether I like it or not.* I must get action on something," she told herself, grimly.

That night she sat down on the little stool in front of her fire, and stared a long time into the flames. Yes, she must get busy. "I've been a pig. I've had a grouch on, just because I didn't get a stick of candy when I wanted it—and wouldn't I have been sick of my candy by this time, if I'd got it! How *can* Lolly stand him? What a fool I was." . . . Yes, she must "get busy"; why not try and do something for those poor, wretched women who are sent to the House of Detention? What she had seen and heard in that stone-lined room had left a scar upon her mind. "I'll make Arthur tell me how to get at them," she thought. Suddenly she remembered Miss Eliza's thrust: "It's selfish in you—when he's so fond of you."

She gave a little start: "Oh, but that's impossible! That sort of thing is over for him. But he's my best friend," she told herself.

CHAPTER XXVI

IT was late in September, when she asked Arthur Weston to tell her how she could help "those awful women,"—as she called the poor creatures she had seen in jail. He had motored out to Lakeville for a cup of tea, and while they waited for the kettle to boil, they wandered off along the shore of the lake, and found a little inlet walled with willows, where they could sit on the beach and see nothing but the wrinkling flash of waves and a serene stretch of sky. They sat there, talking idly, and watching the willow leaves turn all their silvery backs to a hesitating breeze.

Weston listened silently to her plans for "getting busy" with prison reform—when she suddenly broke off:

"I don't see that the vote will do much."

He gave her an astonished look. "What! This from *you*?"

She nodded. "Of course I'm for suffrage, first, last, and all the time! But I'm sort of discouraged about what we can accomplish. Life is so big." The old cocksureness was gone. The pathos of common sense in Freddy made him wince. "But I've got to do something," she ended. "Miss Eliza told me I was selfish."

"Look here! I won't let Cousin Eliza call you names! I reserve that for myself."

She laughed. "You've done it, often enough."

Arthur Weston tickled the sleeping Zip and whistled.

"What do you suppose Laura told me the other day?" Fred said. "She said that 'no woman really knew what life meant unless she had a baby.' She said having a baby was like coming out of prison—because 'self' is a prison. Rather tall talk for little Laura, wasn't it?"

"Any of the great human experiences are keys to our prison-house," he said.

"True enough," she agreed; then, abruptly, her own great experience spoke: "Isn't it queer? I rather dislike Howard."

"It's unreasonable. He's the same old Howard—a mighty decent chap."

"He's not—what I supposed he was."

"Well, that's your fault, not his. You dressed him up in your ideas; when he got into his own clothes, you didn't like him. Howard never pretended to be anything he wasn't."

"Yes! Yes, he did!" she said, with sudden agitation. "He used to—listen to me."

"Good heavens, don't hold that up against him! Don't I listen to you?"

"Oh, but you never let me think you agree with me! I always know you don't."

"He agrees far more than I do."

"No," she said, with a somber look. "He just let me talk. He didn't care. The things that were real to me

weren't real to him. His real things were—what's happening now. The baby, and Laura. Is it so with all of you? Don't you ever care with your *minds?*"

He stopped tickling Zip, and looked out over the lake with narrowing eyes; after a while he said, gently:

"I think the caring with the mind comes second. When a man falls in love, the mind has nothing to do with it. Sometimes it reinforces the heart, so to speak; when that happens, you have the perfect marriage—which isn't awfully common. It's apt to be just the heart; which gets pretty dull after a while. But just the head is arid."

"He would have found just my head,—arid?" she pondered.

He looked straight at her, and said, quietly: "I think he would."

There was a long pause.

"Was it head, or heart, with you?" she said.

"It's both," he said.

She gave him a puzzled look: "Why, you don't mean that you care for that horrid Kate, still?"

He smiled, and looked off over the water.

"You are very stupid, Fred."

She was plainly perplexed. "I don't understand?"

"That's why I say you are stupid."

His face was turned away from her; he was breaking a dead twig into inch-long pieces, and carefully arranging them in a precise fagot on his knee; she saw, with a little shock of surprise, that his fingers were trembling.

"Why, Arthur!" she began,—and stopped short, the color rising slowly to her forehead. He gave her a quick look.

"Why!" she said again, faintly, "you don't mean—? you're not—?"

He laughed, opening his hands in a gesture of amused and hopeless assent. "I am," he said, and flung the tiny fagot out on the water.

Fred dropped her chin on her fists and watched the twigs dancing off over the waves. They were both silent; then she said, frowning, and pausing a little between her words as if trying to take in their full meaning:— "You are in love with me."

"Has it just struck you?"

"How could it strike me—that you would care for a girl like me!"

"Considering your intelligence, you are astonishingly obtuse, at times. I couldn't care for any other kind of girl. Or for any girl, except you!"

"Miss Eliza said something that made me wonder if . . . But I couldn't believe it. I thought that sort of thing was over for you. I never dreamed of—"

"Oh, well! don't dream of it now. Of course it doesn't make a particle of difference. I didn't mean to speak of it; it sort of broke loose," he ended, in rueful confession.

Fred was silent.

Arthur Weston, hiding the tremor that was tingling all through him, began to talk easily, of anything—Zip, the weather, whether Miss Carter could be induced to reconsider her annual resignation; "It would be very hard on Mrs. Payton to lose her," he said.

"Well," Frederica said, slowly, "I don't see any reason why I shouldn't marry you."

He caught his breath; then struck his hand on hers.

"You're a good sport! I take back my accusation that you weren't. I could name several reasons why you shouldn't marry me."

"Name them."

"Fred, look here; this is a serious business with me. I can't talk about it."

"I want to talk about it. I'd like to know your reasons."

"To begin with—age."

She nodded. "In years you are older. But I'm not young any more."

The water stung in his eyes; she was right—she was not "young" now. "The next reason," he went on, without looking at her, "is that you are not in love with me."

She thought that over: "But I am fond of you."

"That won't do for marriage."

"It's more than just fondness with you?" she asked, doubtfully.

He caught her hand, kissed it, and flung it from him. "Come!" he said, harshly, "let's go home!" He rose, but she did not move.

"Do you *love* me?" she insisted, looking up at him.

He was silent. When he spoke his voice was rough with suffering. "I love you as much . . . as I can. But it's not worth the taking. I know that. I wouldn't ask you to take it. You ought to have—fire and gold! I spent my gold ten years ago; and the fire burned itself out. Don't talk about it. I feel like lead, sometimes, compared with you. But I'm not adamant."

She got on her feet, and stood looking out over the

lake. For a long while neither of them spoke. Then she said: "Arthur, I'm not in love with anybody else. I can't imagine, now, how I ever thought I was!"

"You will be in love with somebody else one of these days."

She shook her head. "No; that's all over. There is no fire and gold in me, either. Something—was killed, I think."

"It will come to life."

She gave a little gasp: "No. It's dead. But what is left is—well, it isn't bad, what's left. Sometimes," she said, with sudden sweet gaiety, "sometimes I think it's better than what Howard and Laura have!"

"No, it isn't," he said, sadly.

"I wonder," she pondered, "if I could have been . . . like Laura? She hasn't a thought except for the baby and Howard. They are the center of Life to her;—which is all right, I suppose. But they are it's circumference, too; which seems to me dreadfully cramping. I never could be like that."

He smiled, in spite of himself. "Nature is a pretty big thing, Fred; when you hold your own child in your arms—" he stopped short. "Life is bigger than theories," he said, in a low voice.

She nodded: "I know what you mean. But I never could be a fool, Arthur."

"I think," he said, and again something in his voice made her catch her breath; "I *think* you could be,—at moments."

"Better not count on it," she said; "but if you want

me, in spite of my 'arid' head,—you can take me! Of course, just for a minute, when I wrung it from you that you—cared, I was rather stunned, because I didn't believe Miss Eliza knew. But on the whole, I think—I'd like it." She smiled at him, and her eyes brimmed with affection. "You see, we're friends; and you never bore me. Howard would have bored me awfully. So—I will marry you, Arthur."

He was silent. "Rather hard," she said, mischievously, "to have to offer myself tw—"

"Stop!" he said; "don't say things like that!"

"Well, then—" she began; but he lifted a silencing hand:

"My dear, my dear, I love you too much to marry you."

"Why, then," she said, simply "you love me, it seems to me, enough to marry me. Don't you see?"

He looked at her with hungry eyes. "I think I am man enough to save you from myself," he said; "but don't—don't tempt me too far!" . . .

CHAPTER XXVII

THAT was in September. It was the first of December when Howard Maitland came leaping up-stairs, two steps at a time, and burst into the nursery, so chock-full of news that he could hardly wait to see the way Betty's toes would grip your finger if you put it on the sole of her pink foot.

"Who *do* you suppose is engaged?"

"Jack McKnight," Laura said; "Howard, kiss her little neck, right under her ear."

He kissed it, and said, "No! Not McKnight. You wouldn't guess in a hundred years!"

"Well, then, you'd better tell me. See, Father, she's smiling! Howard, I think she's really a very distinguished-looking baby; don't you?"

"She looks like her ma, so of course she is!"

"Nonsense! She's the image of you. What do you think? When I went down to luncheon, Sarah says she turned her head right around to watch me go out of the room."

"Gosh! She'll be reading Browning next! Laura—why don't you rise about the engagement? You'll scream when I tell you."

"Well, tell me."

"Fred Payton and—"

"What!"

"Hold on. I've not begun to holler yet. *And*—old Weston."

"*What!*"

"I thought you'd sit up."

"Howard! I don't believe it."

"It's true. I met Mrs. Payton, and she told me. She kept me standing on the corner for a quarter of an hour while she explained that she was going to do up her Christmas presents now, so she could get the house in order for the wedding. It's to be in January. The engagement comes out to-morrow. It's been cooking since September, but they didn't really tie up until last week. I'm pledged to secrecy, but your Aunt Nelly said I could tell you."

"I never was so astonished in my life!" Laura gasped.

"I was—surprised, myself," Howard said.

"Well," said Laura, "I'm glad poor old Fred is going to be married—but how *can* she! Of course I know he's been gone on her for ages; but I don't see how he dared to propose to her—he's old enough to be her father! Maybe she took pity on him and proposed to him," Laura declared, giggling.

"The baby has a double chin," her husband said, hurriedly.

"Fred converted him to suffrage last summer," Laura said; "that showed which way the wind was blowing."

Howard stopped tickling his daughter's neck, and frowned, as if trying to remember something. "Weston

a suffragist? That's interesting! Leighton—you remember?—the man who went to the Philippines with me?"

Laura nodded abstractedly.

"Well, he said that if a man was a suffragist it was because he was either in the cradle or the grave. He said the man of affairs was bored to extinction by the whole hullabaloo business. He considered me in the cradle; so I suppose he'd say that Weston—"

"Mr. Weston may be in the grave, but you're not in the cradle," Laura interrupted, affronted; "you are the father of a family!"

"Well, to be candid, I'm not crazy about suffrage," Howard confessed, and was pummeled by his baby's fists, carefully directed by the maternal hand.

"I'm ashamed of you! Betty and I are going to walk in the parade, and you shall carry a banner."

"Thanks so much; I fear business will call me to Philadelphia that day. Too bad!"

"Freddy and Mr. Weston!" Laura repeated; "well, I *don't* understand it!"

"Neither do I," said her husband. He walked over to the window and stood with his hands in his pockets, looking out into the rain; behind him he heard the nursery door open, and Laura's contented voice:

"No, Sarah, I don't need you. I'm going to put her to bed myself. You go down and have your supper. Just put her little nightie on the fender before you go, so it will be nice and warm." Then the door closed again, and he could hear Laura mumbling in the baby's neck:

"Sweety! Mother loves! Put little hanny into the

sleeve. . . . Oh, Howard, look at her! Did you ever see anything so killing? Howard, just think! Fred told me once that she was going to have a trained nurse for her children. Well, she'll know better when she has 'em! Ooo-oo—*sweety!*—don't pull mother's hair!" The firelit warmth, the little night-gown scorching on the fender, Laura in the low chair, his child's head on her breast—the young man, staring out into the rain and darkness, felt something tighten in his throat. Life was so perfect! There, behind him, by the hearth, in warm security, were his two Treasures—to be cared for, and guarded, and made happy. He lived only to stand between them and Fate. His very flesh and blood were theirs! "I wouldn't let the wind blow on them!" he thought, fiercely. But Fred Payton wouldn't let anybody stand between her and the gales of life. He couldn't imagine Arthur Weston protecting Fred. Imagine any man trying to take care of Fred! "She'd be taking care of him, the first thing he'd know! Still, I take off my hat to her, every time. She's big."

Down in the bottom of his heart was a queer uneasiness: he was not "big," himself; "I am satisfied just to be happy; Fred wants something more than that. She's more worthwhile than I am," he thought, humbly. He turned and looked at the two by the fire, then came over, and, kneeling down, took his World into his arms.

"Oh, *Laura!*" he said; he rested his head on his wife's shoulder, and felt the baby's silky hair against his lips. "Laura, how perfect life is! I'm so happy, I'm frightened! —and I don't deserve it. Fred Payton is worth six of me."

Laura gave a little squeal. "As if any girl was as good as you! Besides, poor, dear Freddy—nobody appreciates her more than I do, but Howard, you know perfectly well that she is—I mean she isn't—I mean, well, *you* know? Poor Fred, she's perfectly fine, but nobody except somebody like Mr. Weston would want to marry her, because she is awfully bossy. And a man doesn't like a bossy woman, now does he?"

"You bet he doesn't!" Howard said. "But I take my hat off to Fred."

"Oh, of course," said Laura.

"Thank God, she's got a man to keep her in order!" said Mr. William Childs.

"What shall we give her for a wedding-present?" Mrs. Childs ruminated.

"Give Weston a switch!" said Billy-boy.

"I shall miss her terribly," said Mrs. Payton; "I don't know how I'm going to get along without her." Her lip trembled and she looked at her mother, who was running a furtive, white-gloved finger across Mr. Andrew Payton's marble toga. "Oh, yes; it isn't dusted," Mrs. Payton sighed; "you can't get servants to dust anything nowadays."

"Fred will make 'em dust!" Mrs. Holmes said, with satisfaction. "All Fred needs is to be married. Miss Eliza Graham told me that she had gumption. I said *he* had gumption, to get her!"

"I wonder if he knows about her affair with Laura's husband," Miss Spencer ruminated. "Some one ought to tell him, just out of kindness." (And the very next day an anonymous letter did tell him, for which he was duly grateful.)

"I *hope* she will make you happy," Miss Mary Graham told her cousin, sighing.

"Well, Arthur will make her happy," Miss Eliza said, decidedly; "and that's what he cares about! As for her making him happy, it will be his own fault if she doesn't. She'll interest you, Arthur—that's what a man like you wants."

"I'm to be 'amused,' am I?" Arthur Weston said, grimly. "But suppose I don't 'amuse' her?" And as the older sister went out to the door with him to say good-by, he added: "Am I a thief? Of course, I've got the best of the bargain."

She did not contradict him. "I think," she said, her face full of pain and pity, "that Fred has got the very best bargain that, being Fred, she could possibly get."

"No!" he said, "you're wrong! But pray God she never finds it out."

He did not mean to let her find it out!

But that afternoon when he went into No. 15 for his tea and for a chance to look at Frederica, and tease her, and feel her frank arm over his shoulder, he was very silent.

They were in the sitting-room, Mrs. Payton having tactfully withdrawn to the entry outside of Morty's room. "When I was a young lady," she told Miss Carter, "I

used to receive Mr. Payton in the back parlor, and Mama always sat in the front parlor. But Mama was very old-fashioned—*I* believe in the new ideas! And then, after all, Mr. Weston is so much older than Freddy—oh, dear me! What a blessing it was to have him fall in love with her!"

"Mother is going round," Fred told her lover, as she handed him his tea, "saying, 'Now lettest thou thy servant . . . !' She's so ecstatic over our engagement."

"I'm rather ecstatic myself," he said; "Fred—I am a highway robber."

"Be still!" she said; and gave him another lump of sugar.

"I love you," he said. "But you—no, it isn't fair; it isn't fair."

She took his teacup from him and snuggled down beside him; "I'm satisfied," she said.

The sense of her content stabbed him. She ought to have so much more than content. He had told her so often enough, in those two months of standing out against his own heart; he told her so when, at last, he yielded. But when he said it now, she would not listen. "I tell you, *I'm* satisfied!" She dropped her head on his shoulder, and hummed a little to herself.

How was a man to break through such content!

"But I *will!*" he told himself.

THE END

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